



SYRIA

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SYRIA

An Incomparable Role in History

Syria is the cradle of the great civilizations, and the accomplishments of her ancient peoples are renowned throughout the world.

It was here that agriculture began ten thousand years ago, that settlement commenced and civilization emerged. Houses, not caves, became man's dwelling, and he embarked on a journey of self-discovery. He observed heaven and sang the earliest hymns. He tried his hand at drawing and sculpture. Evidence of these ancient arts are found all over Syria, at Mereibet, Jeyroud, Yabroud, and on the river banks.

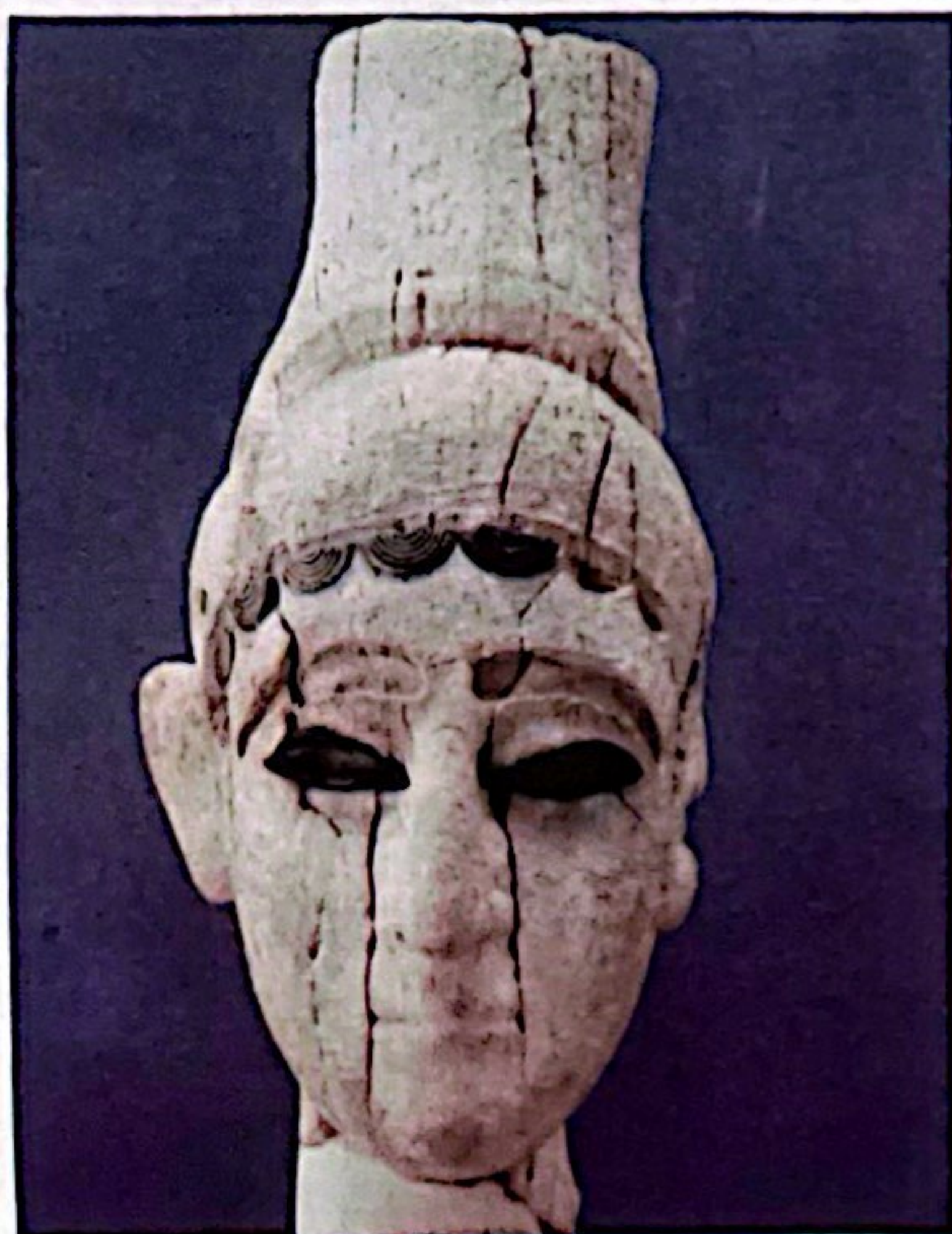
Syria also presented the world with another discovery. It was here that copper was made pliable and bronze was invented. The Bronze civilization came into being at Tel Halaf.

At Mari (Tel Hariri), by the Euphrates and elsewhere, there was an abundance of palaces, temples and murals reflecting advanced cultural and commercial activity.

The kingdom of Ugarit (Ras Shamra) offered mankind the first alphabet in history. At Ebla (Tel Merdikh), a royal palace was discovered containing one of the largest and most comprehensive documentary archives of the ancient world. These specialized in industrial, diplomatic, commercial and administrative matters, in addition to war and peace relations with other countries.



The Alphabet of Ugarit



A Princess from Ugarit

The Amorites, the Canaanites and the Phoenicians inhabited the coastal regions, the Arameans were the highlanders, and the Nabateans inhabited the south.

Successive waves of migrations from the Arab Peninsula gave an Arab identity to Syria, and it

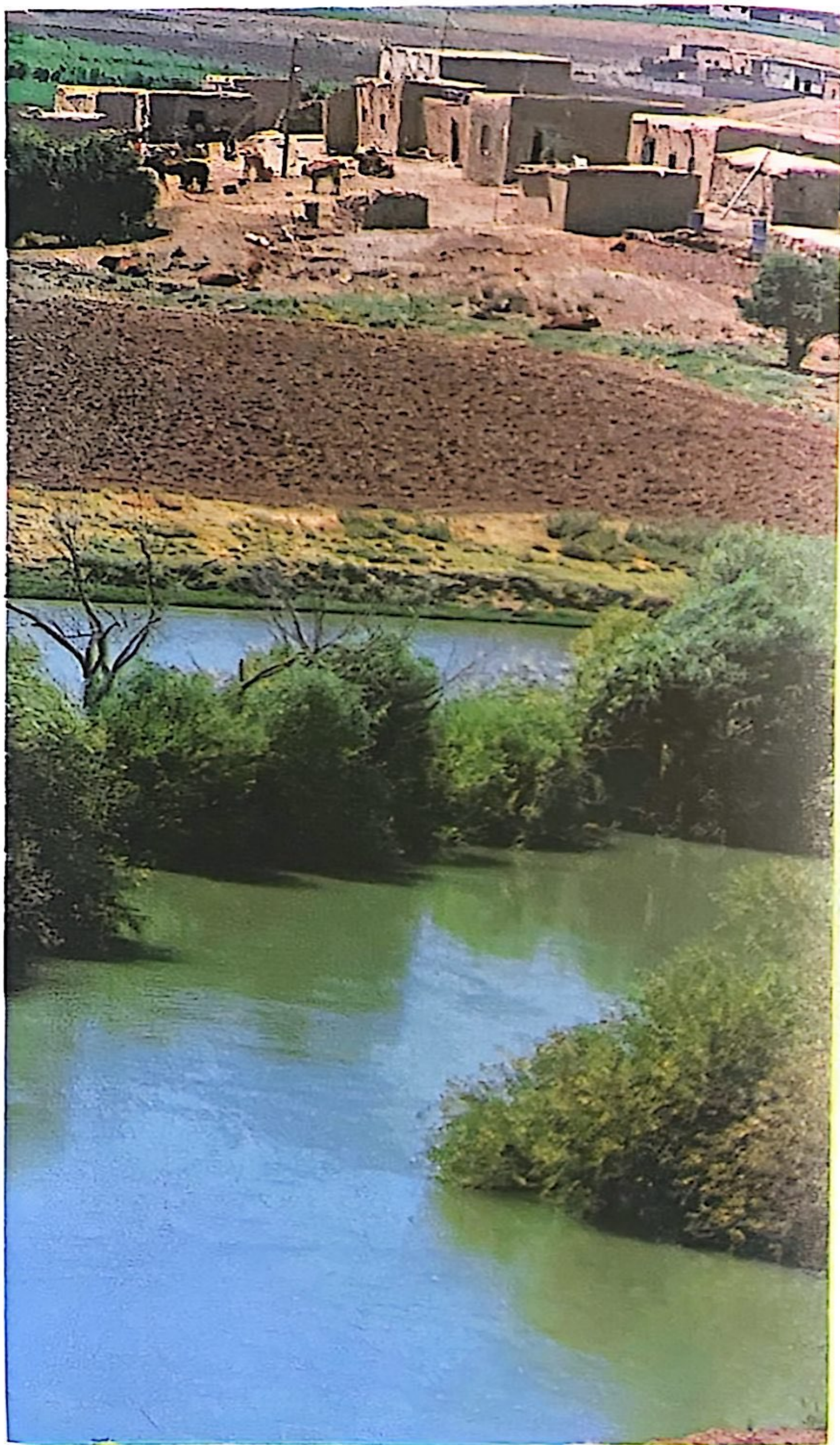
managed to withstand the invasions by Hittites, Persians, Greeks and Romans. The Islamic conquest of 636 A.D. only confirmed this Arab identity and gave a sense of unity to the land.

The immense strategic importance of Syria is due to her unique position as a meeting-point of three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe), and as a crossroad between the Caspian Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Black Sea, and the Nile River. Through Syria lay the silk route which led from China to Doura Europos (Salhieh), from Palmyra and Homs to the Syrian ports on the Mediterranean, where for thousands of years Syrian seafarers had ridden the waves in their enormous fleets with gleaming white sails.

This geographical position lent distinction to the country, not only as a trade and caravan route, but also as a melting-pot of diverse ideas, beliefs, talents, and cultures.

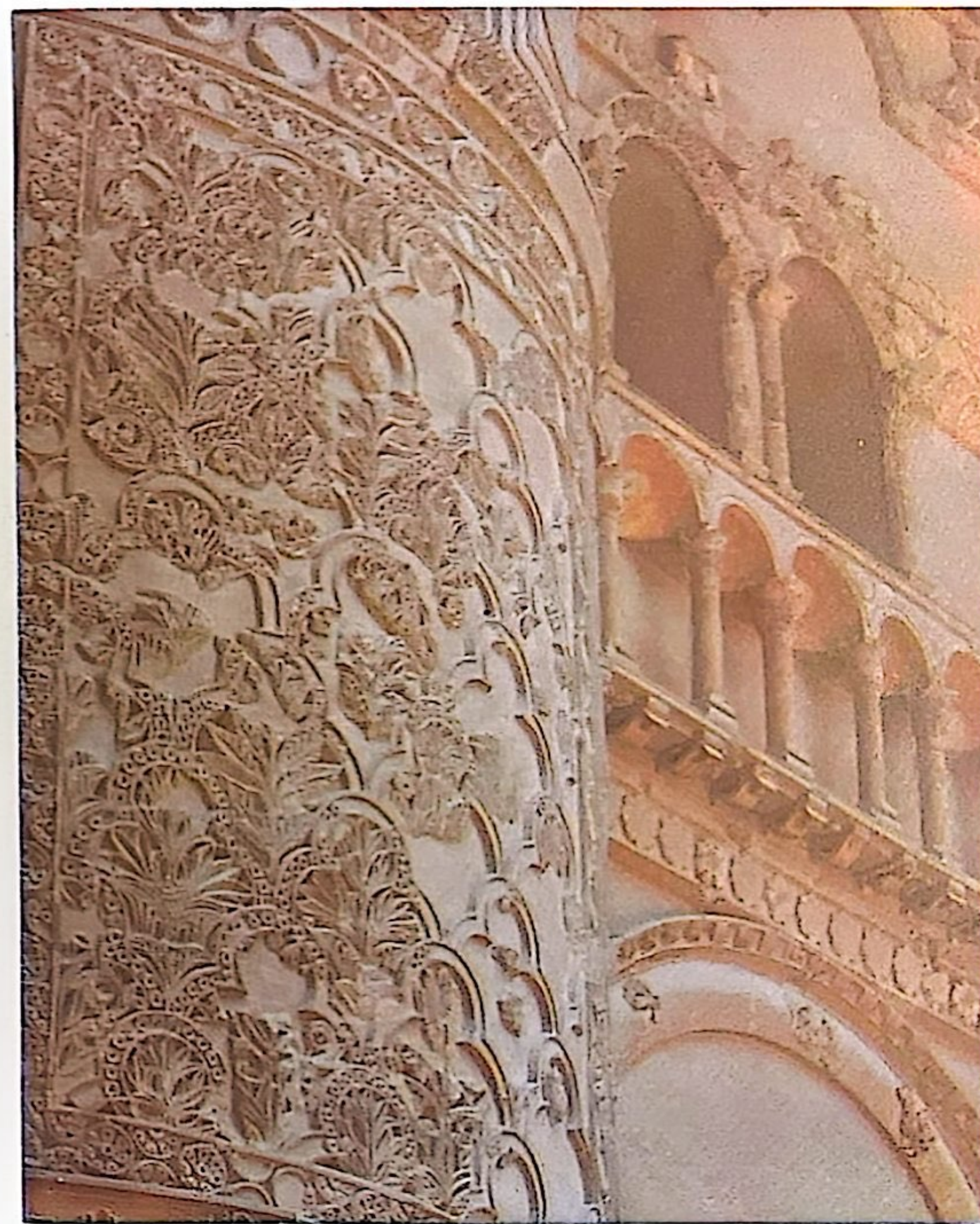


Tablets from Ebla



The Khabur River

A journey through Syria is a journey through time. When you enter the old souks you realize that history is something alive and tangible, something you can see and touch. You walk down the 'Street called Straight' (Midhat Pasha) which stretches from Bab Keissan to Bab al-Jabieh, and you feel that you are walking beside Saul of Tarsus when he saw the light of faith, the light on 'the Road to Damascus'.



The Facade of Qasr al-Hir al-Gharbi- **Damascus Museum**





The View from Qal'at al-Hosn

The silk weavers which you see in Damascus, Hama and Aleppo still work at their wooden hand looms just like their ancestors did in Ebla four thousand years ago. Glass blowers at their brick



Syrian Ceramics (12th. century)

furnaces recall their predecessors who invented coloured glass three thousand years ago. Folk artists still draw pictures of epic heroes almost identical to those engraved on stone by Doura Europos artists in the year 3000 B.C.

Syria is often described as the largest small country in the world because of its wealth of ancient civilizations. Modern man is indebted to this land for much of his thought and learning. Indeed it was aptly said that every intellectual has two homelands: his own, and Syria.

The Continuity of Art in Syria



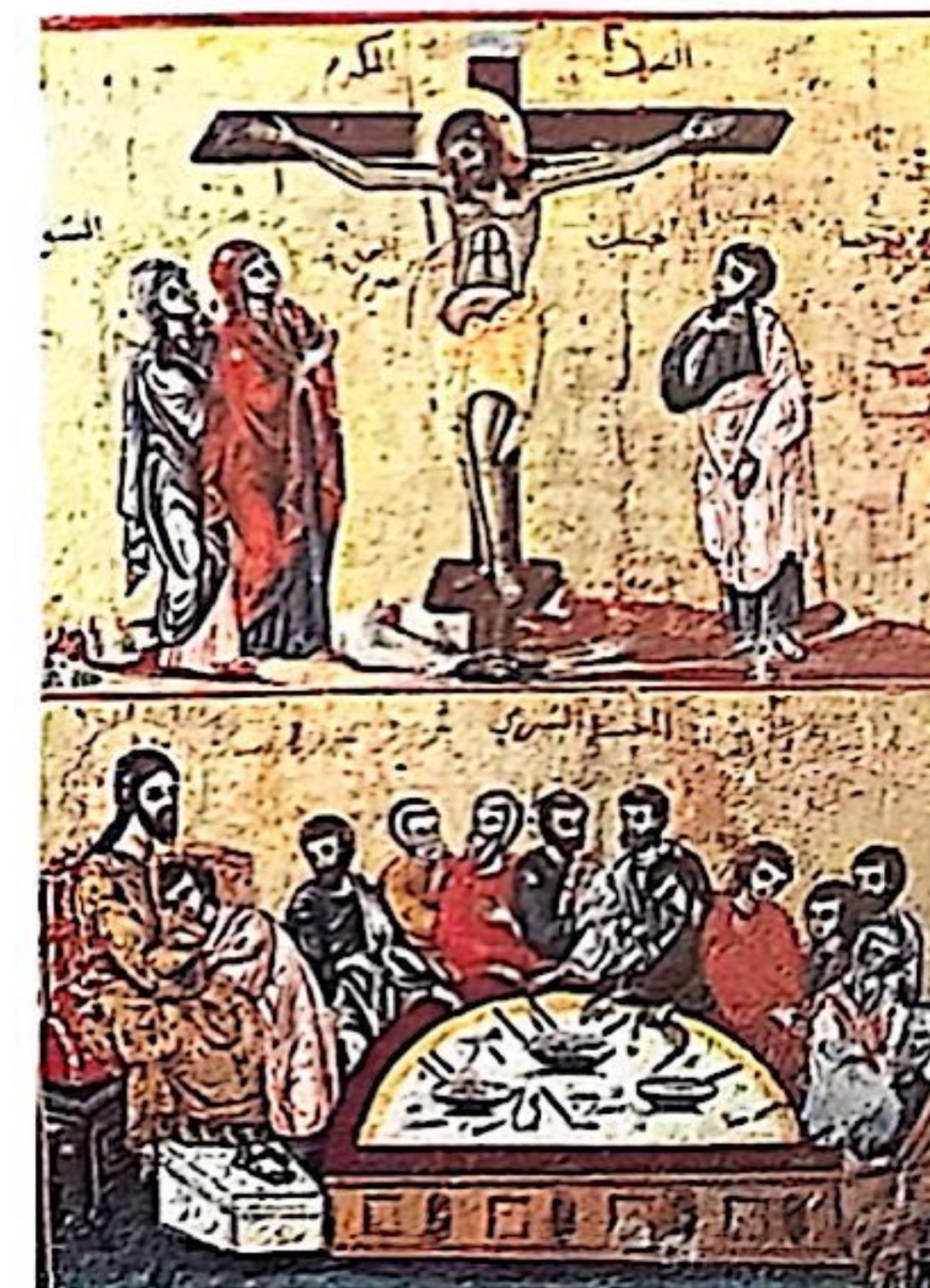
A warrior (By an artist of contemporary folk art)



A Warrior (By an artist from Doura Europos)



Syrian Icons



How to get to Syria

By land:

Syria is linked with other countries by a network of international roads through Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. An international railroad links the country with Turkey and the rest of Europe.

By sea:

Through the two seaports of Latakia and Tartus on the Mediterranean.

By air:

Syrian Arab Airlines (the national airline) and a number of world airlines link Syria through the international airports of Damascus and Aleppo to all parts of the world.

Travellers to Syria can obtain all other relevant information from Syrian embassies and tourist bureaus abroad.



Damascus International Airport

Entry and Exit Procedures:

Foreigners entering Syria must be in possession of:

- 1 - A valid passport.
- 2 - A valid entry visa granted by the Syrian Embassy or Consulate in the visitor's country of origin or residence.
- 3 - Where there is no Syrian mission in the passport holder's country, an entry visa may be issued by any other Syrian mission abroad, or at the point of entry to Syria.
- 4 - Groups of tourists of ten or more are granted a group visa gratis (free of charge) provided each member of the group be in possession of a valid passport.
- 5 - Visitors planning to spend more than 15 days in the country are required to apply to the security authorities for an extension of stay:
- ~~6 - Every visitor must exchange 100\$ at the border.~~
- ~~7 - Tourist groups more than ten persons are exempted from this exchange.~~
- ~~8 - Tourists who visit Syria more than once, within a period of two months are exempted from reexchanging 100\$ for a second time.~~
- 9 - Every tourist must pay 200 S.P. as a departure airport tax.
- 10 - Bills at all hotels are paid in hard Currency
- 11 - Passports of visitors to Syria must not carry an 'Israeli' visa.
- 12 - Fees charged for entry visas are subject to the principle of reciprocity with the country concerned.

- 13 Visitors are not required to obtain an exit visa if their stay does not exceed a period of 15 days.

Customs and Excise:

- 1- Clothes and personal belongings are not subject to customs duties.
- 2- Visitors are allowed the following items free of customs duties although they must be declared:
 - a) 1 litre of eau de cologne
 - b) 1 litre of spirits
 - c) 2 used packs of playing cards
 - d) 200 cigarettes, or 50 cigars. or 250 grams of tobacco
- 3- The following items are also exempted from customs duties provided they be used, declared on entry, and re-exported on leaving the country:
 - a) 1 camera and two films
 - b) 1 cine-camera for amateur photographers
 - c) 1 pair of binoculars
 - d) 1 portable musical instrument
 - e) 1 portable tape-recorder; a perambulator; light camping equipment and utensils; personal games; a bicycle; a hunting rifle licensed by the appropriate authorities both in the visitor's country and in Syria; a small iron; a standard medical kit; make-up; and travelling rugs and blankets.Customs officers are authorised to admit other personal belongings at their discretion.
- 4- The entry of a motor car subject to the owner being in possession of an international driving licence, an international car certificate, and a triptick. The



Hotel al-Cham (Damascus)

car can be used in Syria for a total period of 180 days.

However, visitors can obtain more detailed and up-to-date information from periodical circulars available at Syrian embassies and consulates, or at Syria's international borders.

Accommodation in Syria:

More than 400 hotels provide a considerable choice with regard to costs. There are International Hotels in Damascus (Sheraton, Meridien, al-Cham, Ebla), Latakia (Meridien) Palmyra (al-Cham), Aleppo (Shahba al-Cham), and in Deir al-Zor (Furat al-Cham). Several youth hostels and student dormitories are available during the summer season in Damascus, Aleppo, and Latakia.

Camping sites are also available on the outskirts of some cities and at summer resorts,

In the coastal region there are numerous camping sites with full facilities, as well as hundreds of chalets of various categories and prices.

Food:

Visitors to Syria will always find something to their liking. Syrian cuisine is well-known for its variety. Western cuisine is also available at hotels and restaurants throughout the country.

Drinking water in Syria is perfectly safe, clean and hygienic. It is derived from natural ground and mountain springs and sources and is treated with the most advanced techniques. Most notable is the Ein al-Fijeh source which supplies the city of Damascus



Hotel Meridien (Damascus)



Hotel Sheraton (Damascus)

with its drinking-water. Other mineral water sources are renowned for their purity. Among these are the Boukein and Dreikish spring water sources available in bottles throughout the country.

Other Essential Information:

- 1- There are no endemic or communicable diseases in Syria.
- 2- Urban crime which plagues most modern cities is virtually non-existent in Syria.



Fruits of Syria



Buqein Water

- 3- Electric power: 220 volt/50 cycles.
- 4- Office hours: between 8 a.m. and 2.00 p.m.
Friday is the weekly holiday.
- 5- Shops are open all day until 7 p.m. in winter and 8 p.m. in summer: some shops close for a few hours in the afternoon.



At the Buqein Spring

The basic unit of Syrian currency is the piastre: it is 1/100th of the Lira on which the money system is based. Banknote denominations are as follows (in Liras): 1; 5; 10; 25; 50; 100; and 500

Coins include (in piastres):
5; 10; 25; 50; and 100



Weights and measures in Syria follow the Metric System.

Transport and travel: inter-city travel in modern air-conditioned coaches is organized by two major companies (Karnak and Transtour). Service taxis and trains run regularly between cities, and there are internal flights by Syrianair between

Damascus-Aleppo-Latakia-Qamishli-and Deir al-Zor.

In-town transport is made easy by taxi cabs. Yellow cabs in Damascus charge fares indicated by metres; in other cities fares are set by government departments.



Taxicab

Direct telephone services: are available between Syrian cities and the rest of the world. Visitors can readily obtain information on internal and international calls from hotels or from the Telephone Service.

Telex and telegram services are also available in all parts of the country.

Climate: Syria has a moderate Mediterranean climate, four distinct seasons, and cloudless blue skies for the greater part of the year. Temperatures in autumn and spring range between 20 and 25 degrees



Karnak Buses

centigrade, 30 degrees in summer, and 5 to 15 degrees in winter.

Winter is generally moderate but wet in the coastal region and cold inland; summer is hot and dry inland, hot and humid on the coast.

Winter clothing is recommended between October and May, and summer clothing between May and September.

A considerable number of Syrians speak English or French. Those who speak only Arabic are helpful and hospitable and always friendly to foreigners.

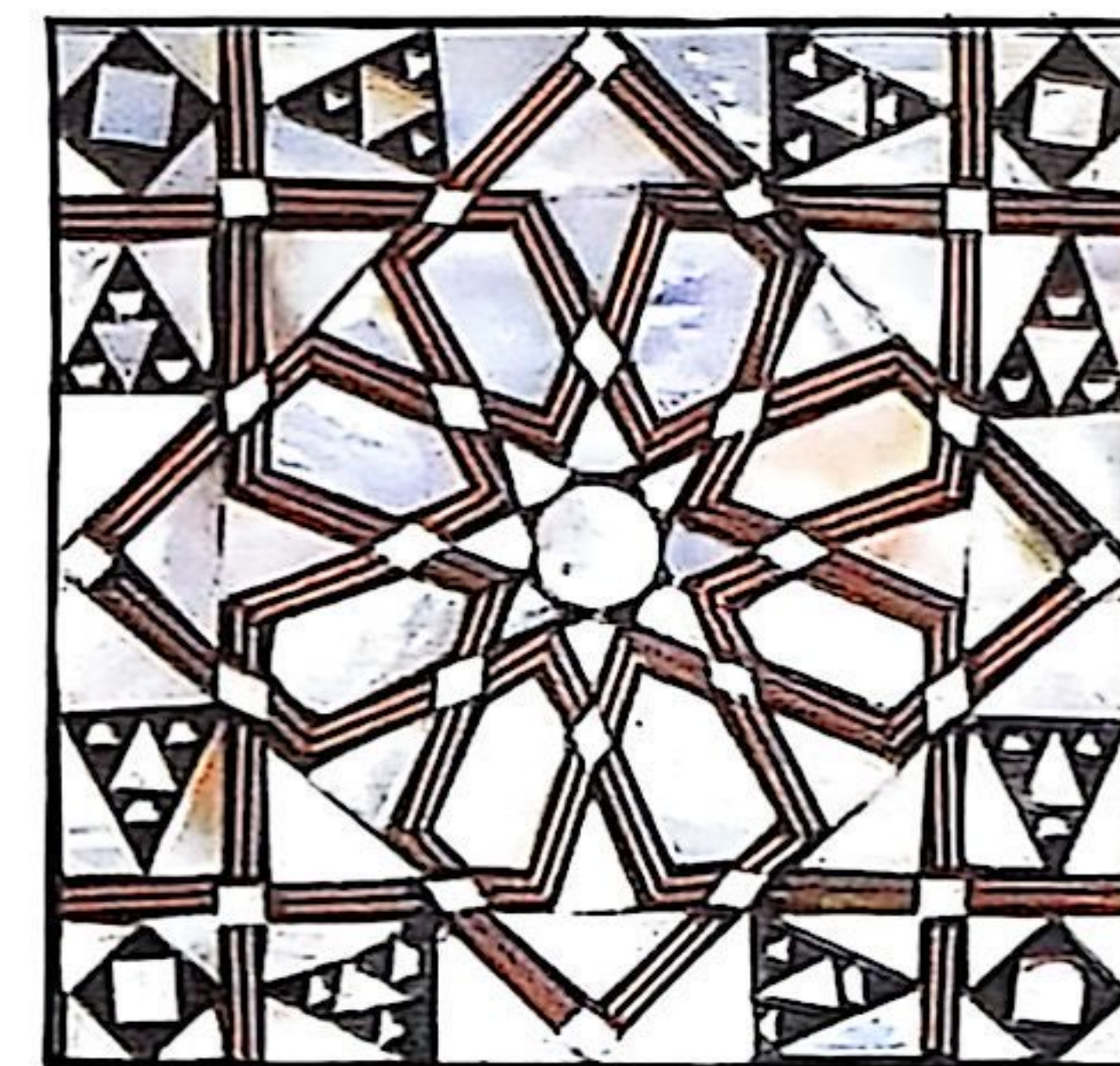
Shopping in Syria is an endless pleasure. Tourists enjoy buying local products unique for their distinctive originality. Favourite items with visitors are:

- Silk brocade embroidered with gold and silver thread, for which Damascus has always been famous.

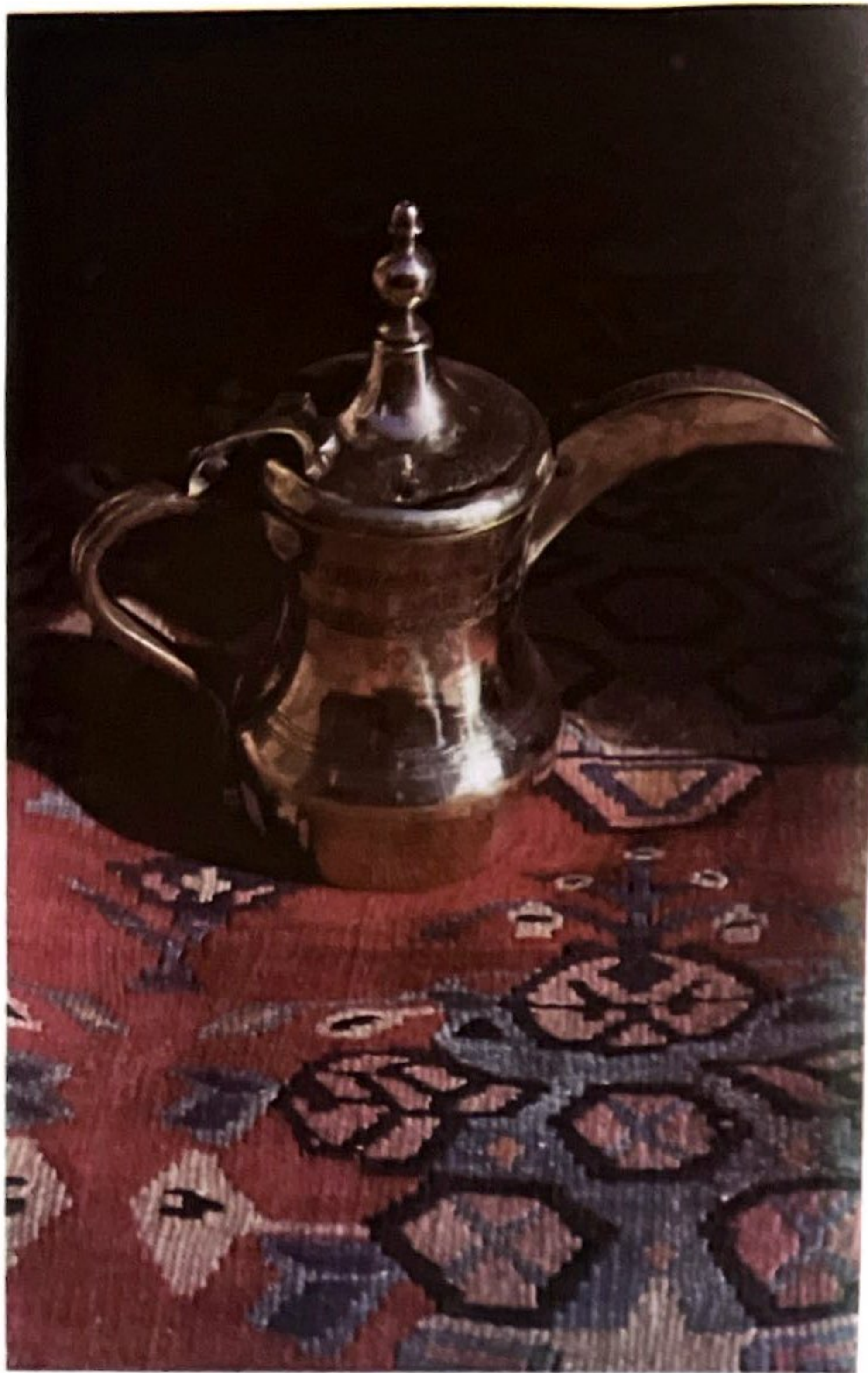


Syrian Brocade

- Hand-engraved brass with silver inlays of different patterns and designs.
- Popular hand-printed cotton garments and cloth, and the 'Sarma' gold embroidery for which Hama is renowned.



Mosaic Art



Copperware



Glassware



Oriental Jewellery

- Pictures of epic and folk heroes painted on glass or cloth.
- Mosaics inlaid with mother-of-pearl and tinted wood.
- Hand-woven rugs made of pure wool.
- Glass made as you-wait-and-watch; this is the work of glass blowers using mud furnaces where liquid glass is turned into pretty beakers, plates, and lamps.

Delicious sweets filled with pistachios. preserved fruit. and Turkish Delight.

Religious services are held in mosques, Churches, and other places of worship throughout the country.

Visitors are expected to respect the sanctity of these places with regard to dress and conduct as they would do elsewhere.

There are clean sand beaches stretching all along the coast, and swimming pools are plentiful in all cities; in sports compounds, large hotels, and the suburbs.



Hotel Meridien (Latakia)

Artistic and cultural events abound throughout the year. Exhibitions, lectures, and seminars are held at universities, museums, and cultural centres. Painting and sculpture by local and foreign artists are exhibited in private galleries throughout the country.



A Painting by Fateh Mudarress

The Continuity of Art in Syria



A Woman in Aba' by an artist from Mari (2600 B. C.)



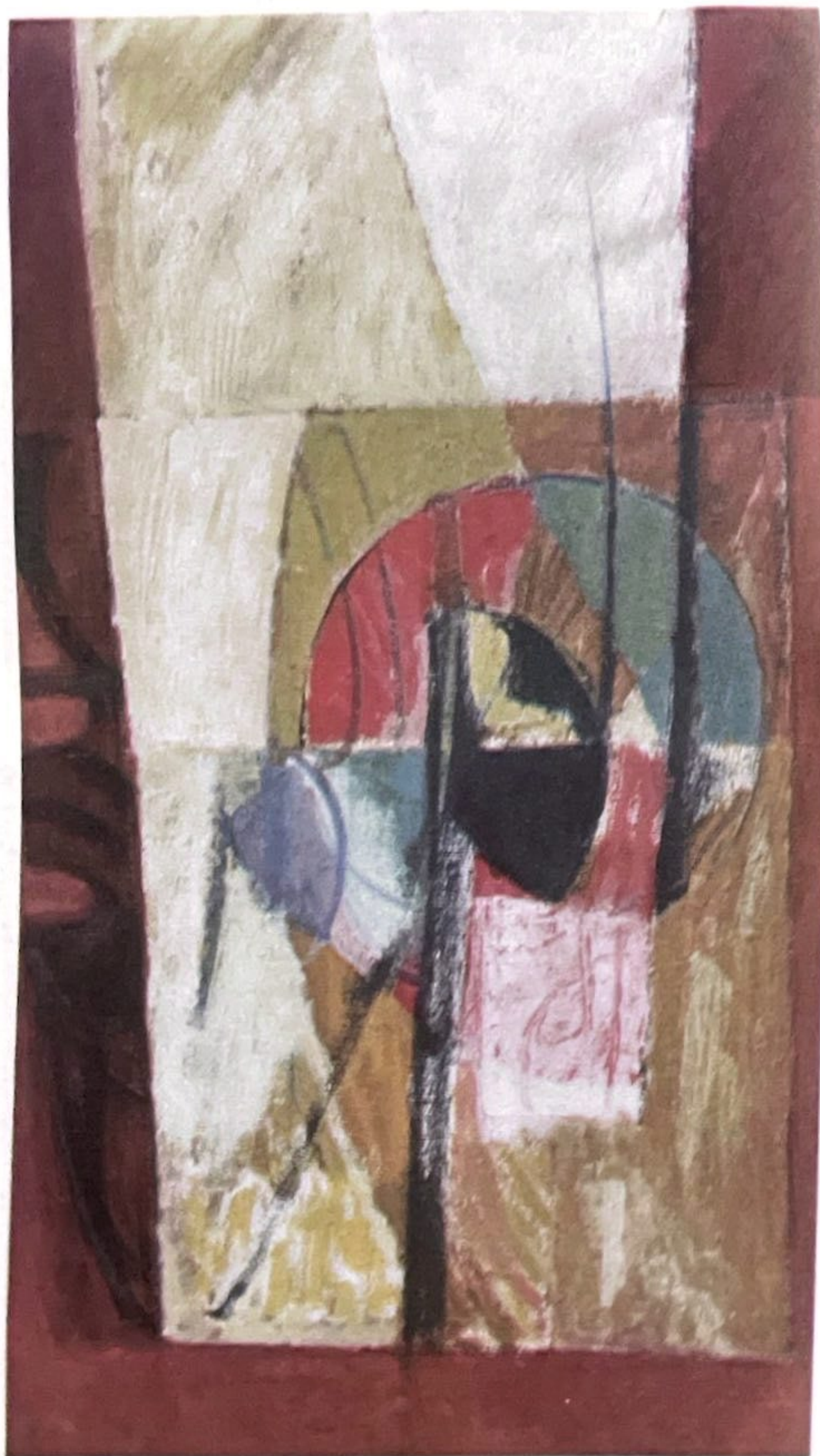
A Woman in Aba' by a contemporary artist:
Turki Mahmud Beyk (1986)



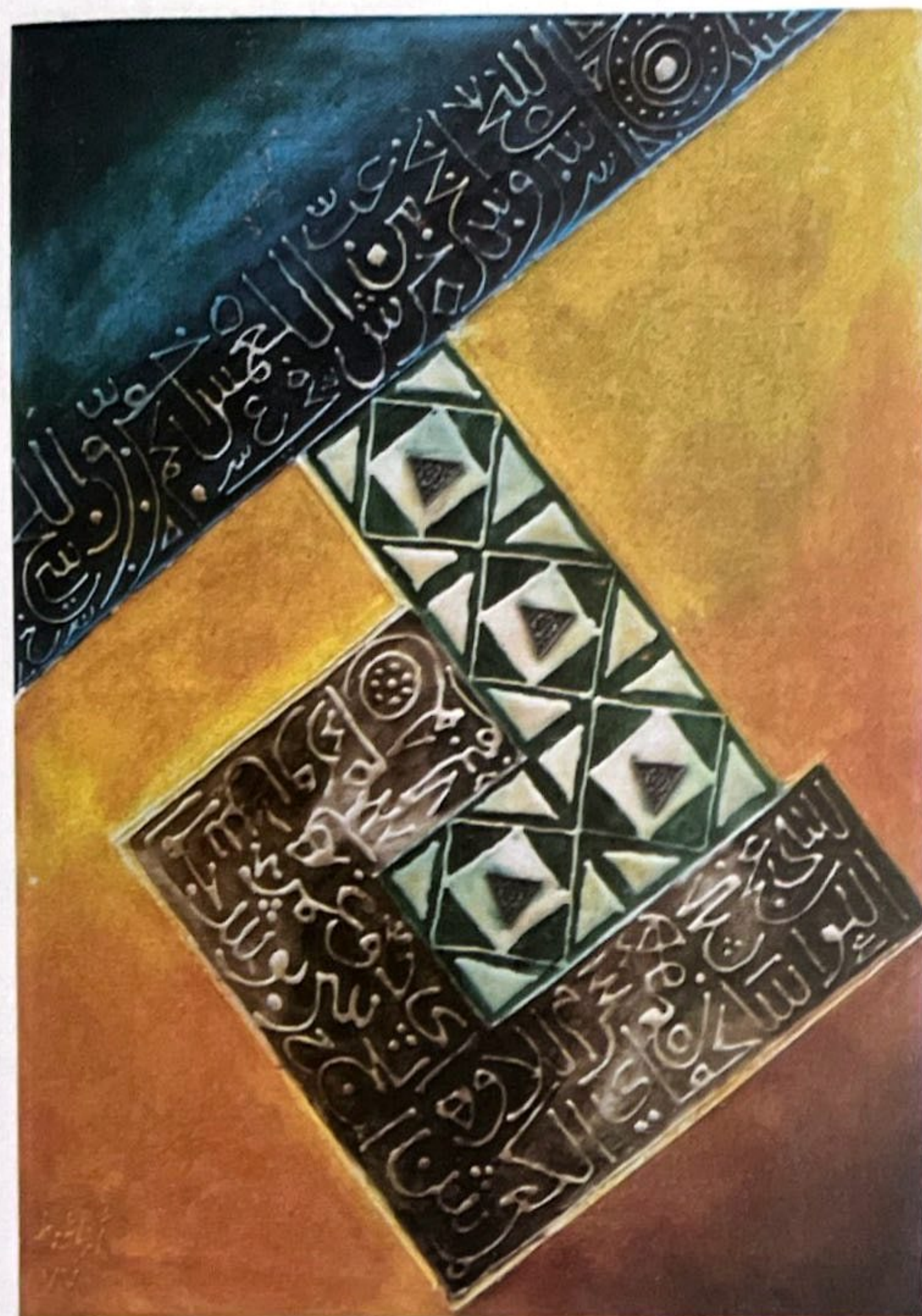
A Painting by Naim Ismail



A Painting by Maysoun al-Jazairi



A Composition by Mahmud Hammad

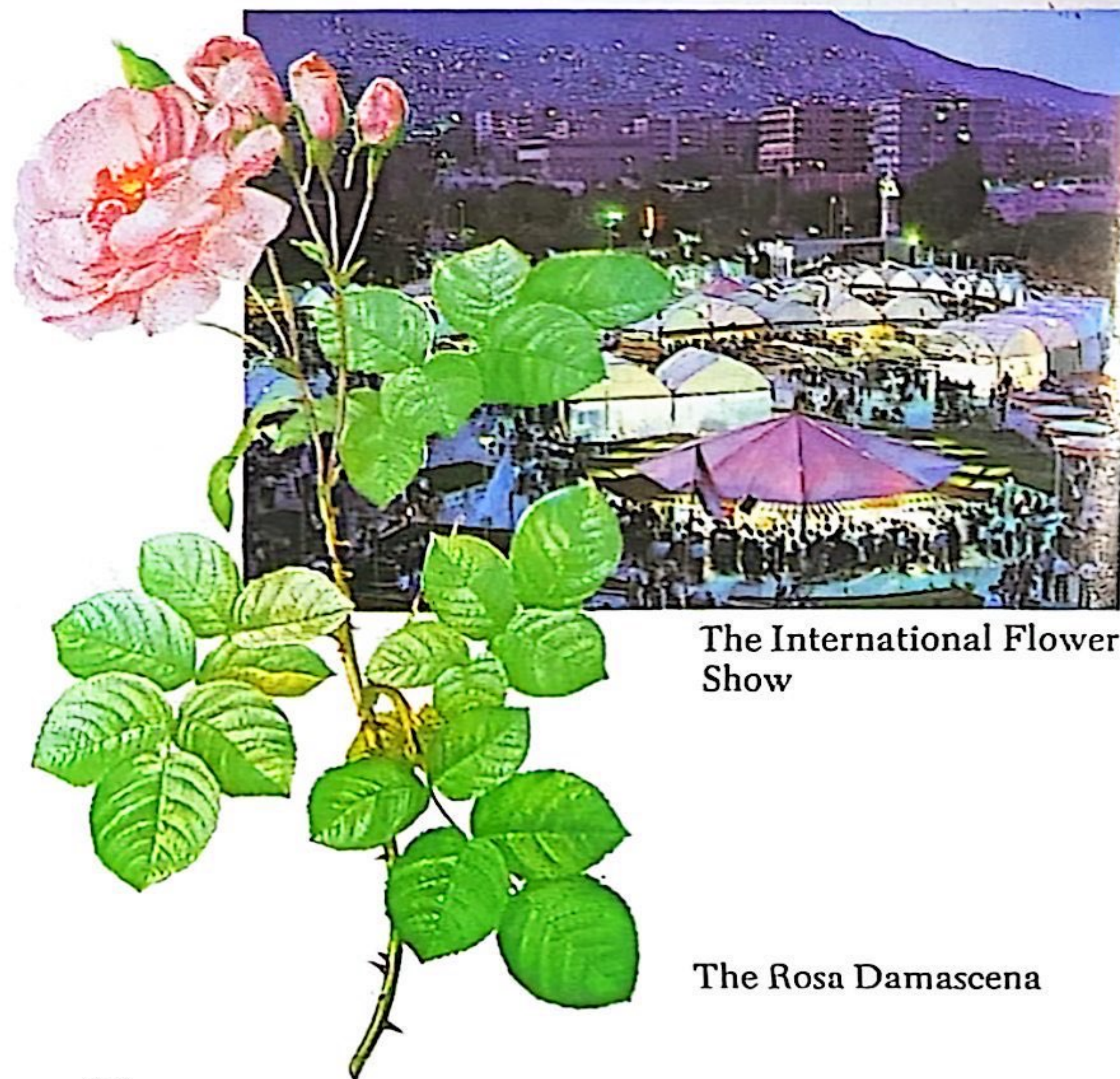


A Composition by Abd al-Qader Arnaout

A number of art festivals and trade fairs take place regularly every year.



Chamber Music at the Palmyra Festival



The International Flower Show

The Rosa Damascena



At an Art Gallery



The al-Assad Library

Radio and Television: Programmes on radio are mainly in Arabic but there are foreign programmes. As for television, there are two channels: one in Arabic and the other in English and French— In addition to the Arabic presse, there is a local daily in English

Syria today

Until the end of World War I, geographical Syria included present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

Present-day Syria, however, covers some 185.000 sq. km. with a population of 12.000.000 people (1986 estimate). Its neighbours are Turkey to the north, Jordan and Palestine to the south, Lebanon to the west, and Iraq to the east. It also has a Mediterranean coastline to the west. It is triangular in shape east of the Mediterranean, and extends between latitudes 32 to 37 north and longitudes 25 to 42 east of Greenwich.

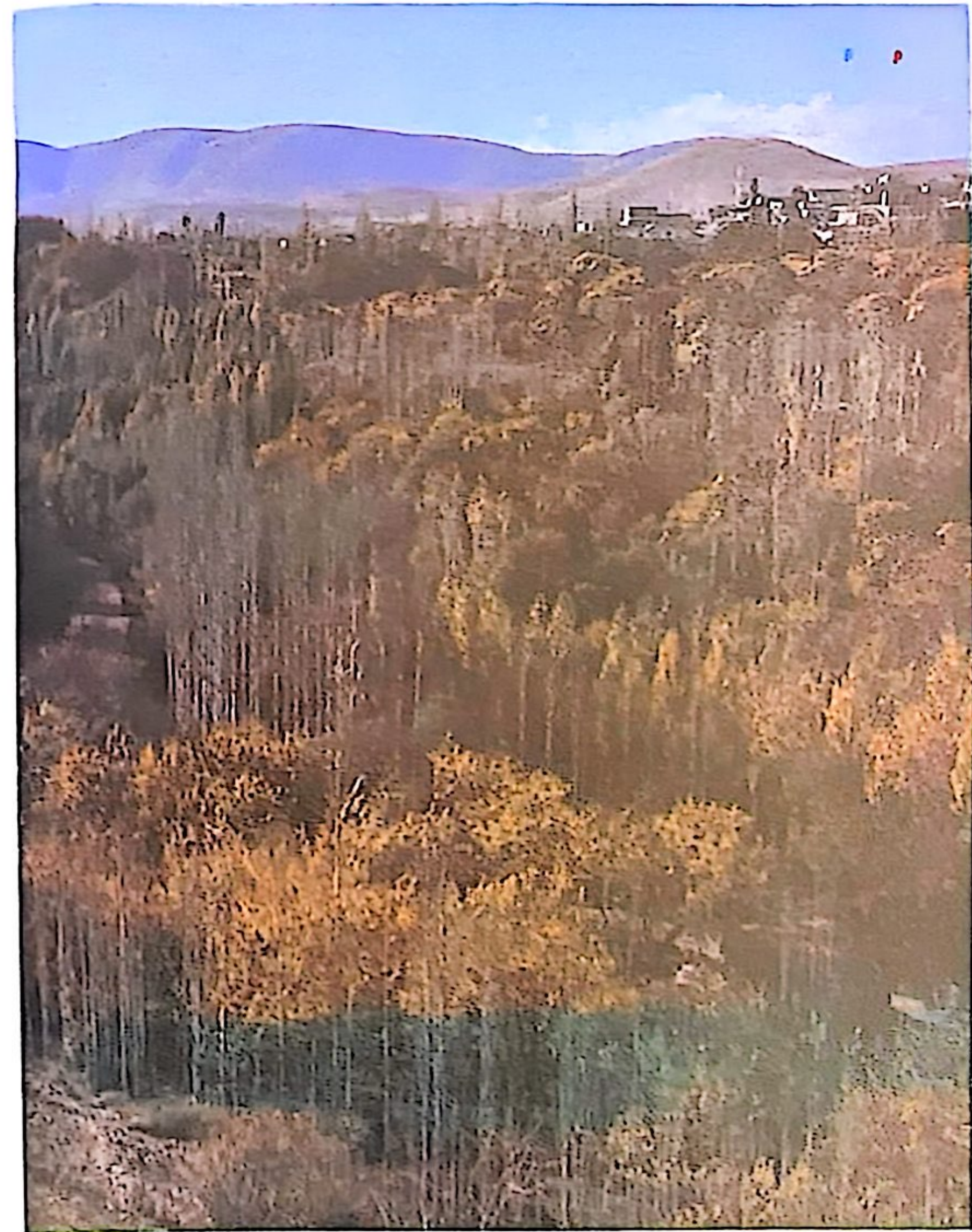
Syria can be divided into five distinct touristic regions with varying features and terrain:

In the west there is a coast line 175km long, and mountains divided into two ranges standing opposite each other:

The eastern range, stretching along the Syria-Lebanon border and called Eastern Mount Lebanon wherein Mount Hermon constitutes the highest peak rising to some 2814 metres and covered with snow all year.

The western range, called Western Mount Lebanon, extends to the northern part of the Syrian coastline where it is known as the Latakia Mountain, and is covered with thickets and forests.

The Orontes river flows between these two ranges and creates a fertile valley extending north to Homs, Hama, and the Aleppo plains.



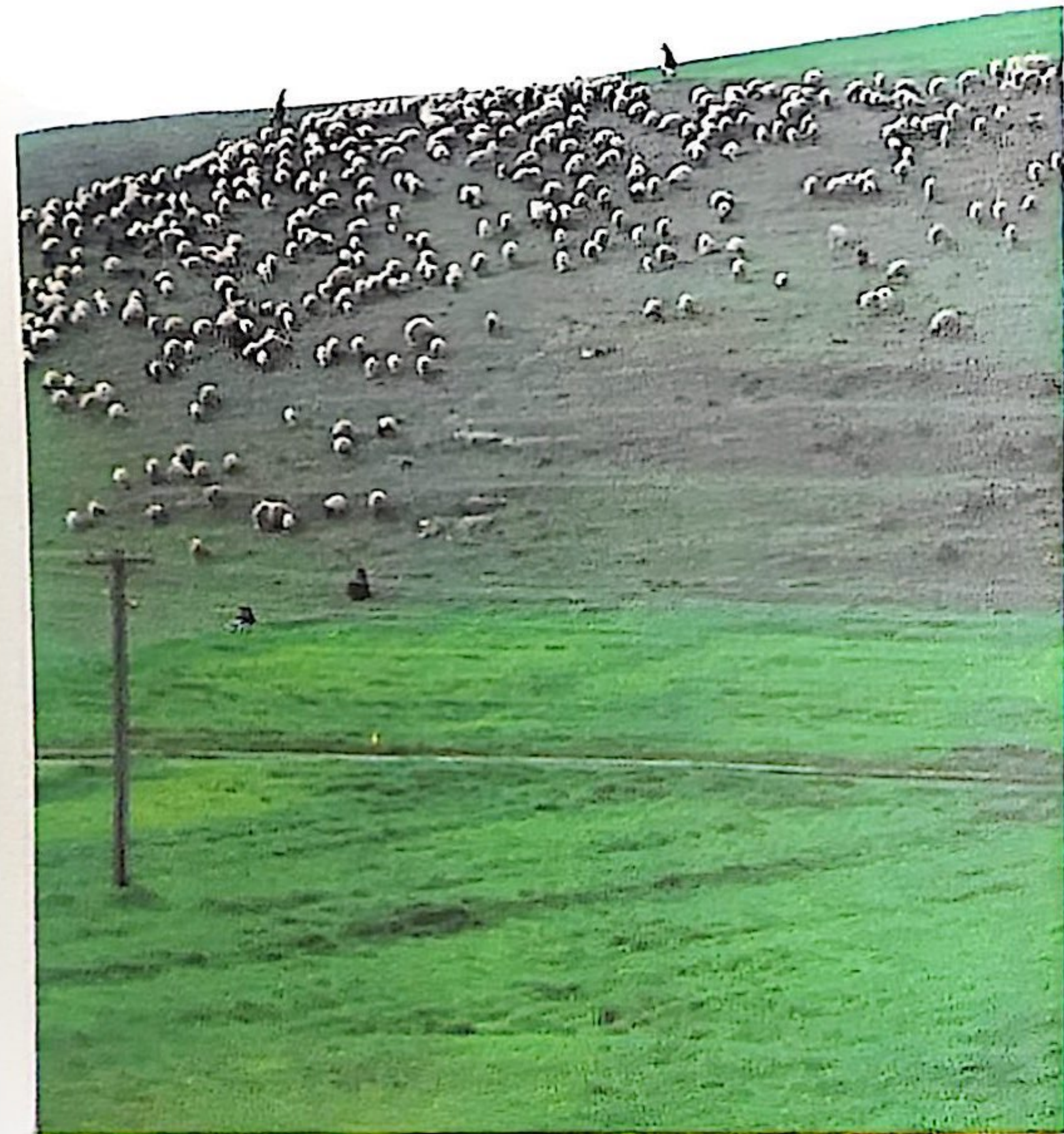
The Barada Valley

- The central part of Syria is covered by what is known as the Al-Sham desert, where plains and pasture lands lend an unusual charm to a vast terrain of sand and rock. In the middle of this lies the famous oasis of Palmyra.



Syrian Landscape

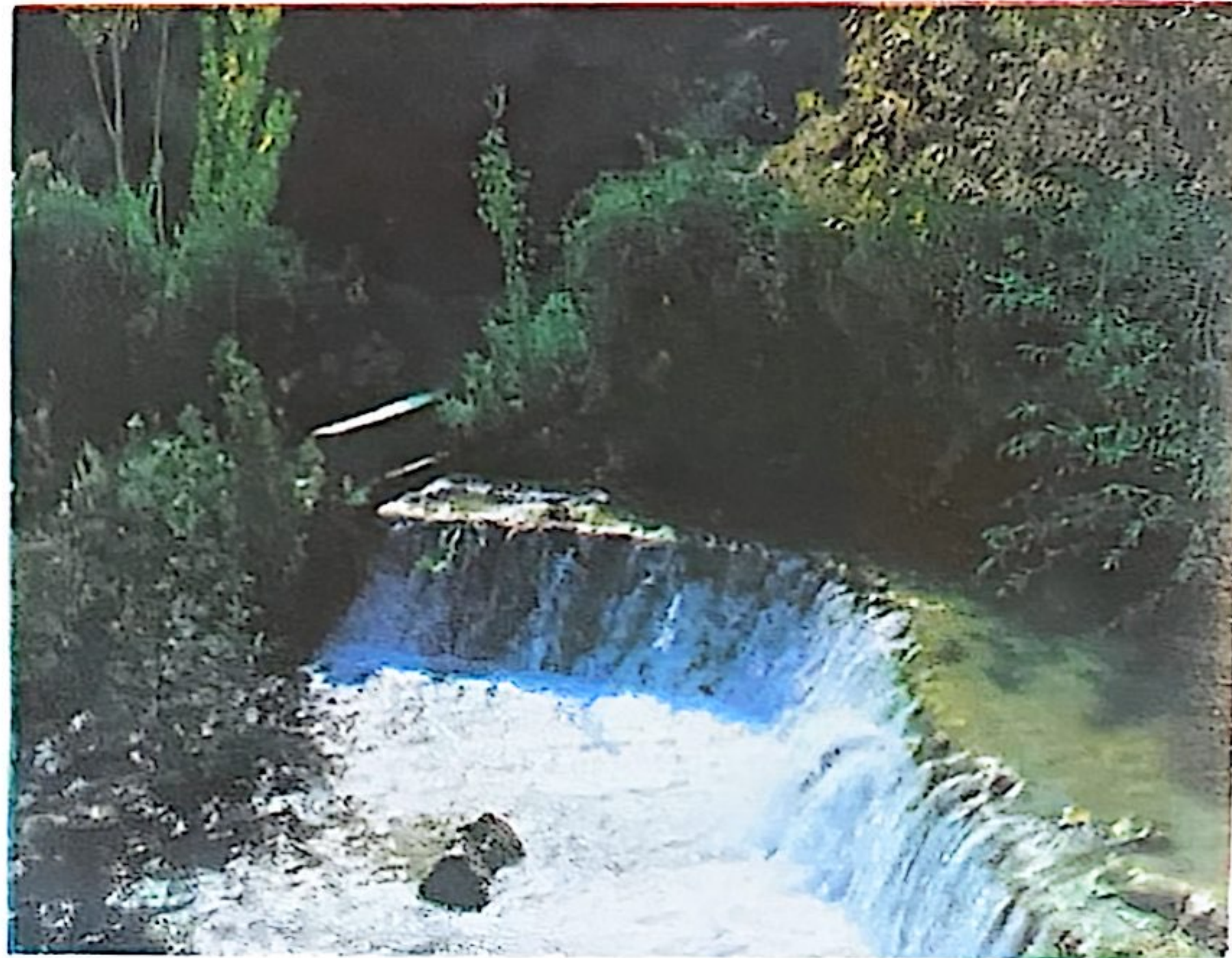
- North of the desert there is a huge fertile basin formed by the Euphrates River, whose source is in Turkish territory. It crosses Syria diagonally in the north-east to exit into Iraqi territory, having been fed by two tributaries in Syria, namely the Khabur and Balikh rivers. On the Syrian part of the river rises a great dam which forms the 80km-long al-Assad Lake.



The Fields of Syria

In this part of the basin there are several mountains, and some newly-discovered oil-fields.

- In the south-west the Ghuta forms a green belt of orchards and farms which surround the capital, Damascus, full of fruit trees. Through this region runs the river Barada, which the Romans called 'The Golden River'. Its spring is in Zabadani, a summer resort near Damascus. The river flows through miles of meadows and orchards, then branches into seven small rivers before reaching Damascus.
- In the south, Jabal al-Arab forms the greater part of the region with its hills, volcanic rocks, historic cities, and rich vineyards. The vast plain of Houran and the Golan Heights form the remainder of this region, and have long been the most fertile part of it along the borders with Lebanon and Palestine.



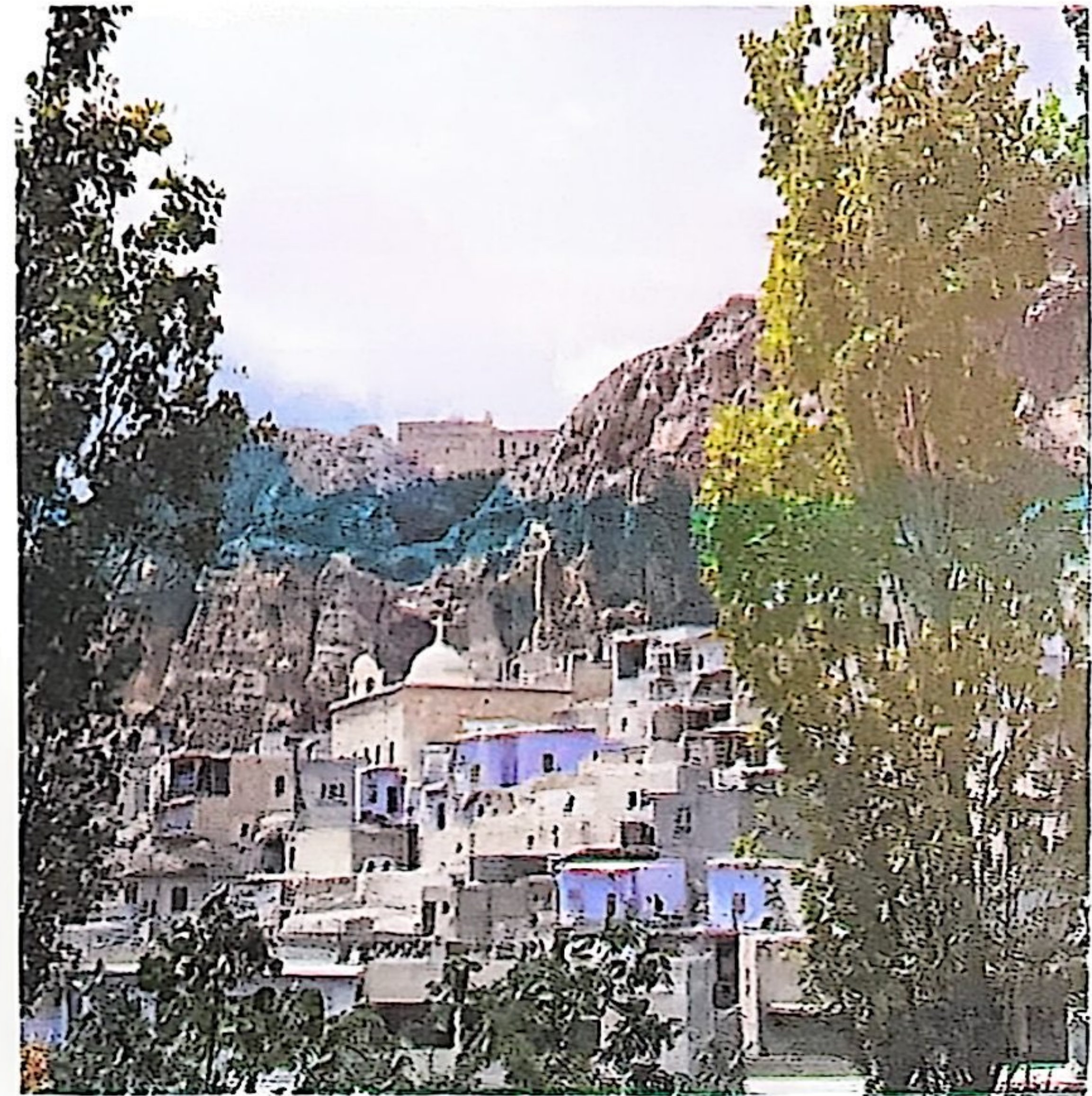
Barada

A land of diversity

Ancient irrigation canals and modern dams, the plough and the tractor, wooden norias in perpetual motion and the latest spraying devices are to be found side by side giving life to the dry and thirsty land.

The costumes of country people are no less colourful and diverse than the lands they cultivate. The individual character of each village is reflected in the architecture of its houses, and in the dress of its inhabitants.

The art festivals held at Palmyra and Bosra every



Ma'lula: A Village carved out of the rocks

year show how the symmetry of the ancient columns and arches blends with the music from all over the world.



Islamic Ceramics (11th. century)

Travelling in Syria: one can see several civilizations within an hour. for example, when browsing in the Damascus souq near the Omayyad Mosque.

The mosque is an impressive Islamic construction erected on the remains of an ancient Aramaic temple. Just outside it there is an enormous Roman arch on huge columns, and close by are Byzantine engravings surrounded by Ottoman, Ayoubite and Mamluk domes.

As you leave urban areas behind to wander about the countryside with its mountains, hills, valleys and plains, you will find an endless variety of colour and scenery.



Arches at Palmyra



Arches at Rasafa



Traditional Dresses



In the Frulloq Forest



From Mari



An hour's drive will take you from fields of wheat and cotton to vineyards and olive trees, to pomegranate and palm-tree oases, to daisy and oleander meadows. On the sea-shore to the north you can watch the Mediterranean's white waves, while in the golden desert you will see a deluge of wild flowers in spring.

Traffic Policeman



Pediatrician



Air Hostess

Syrians at work



Pastry Cook

Administrative Regions

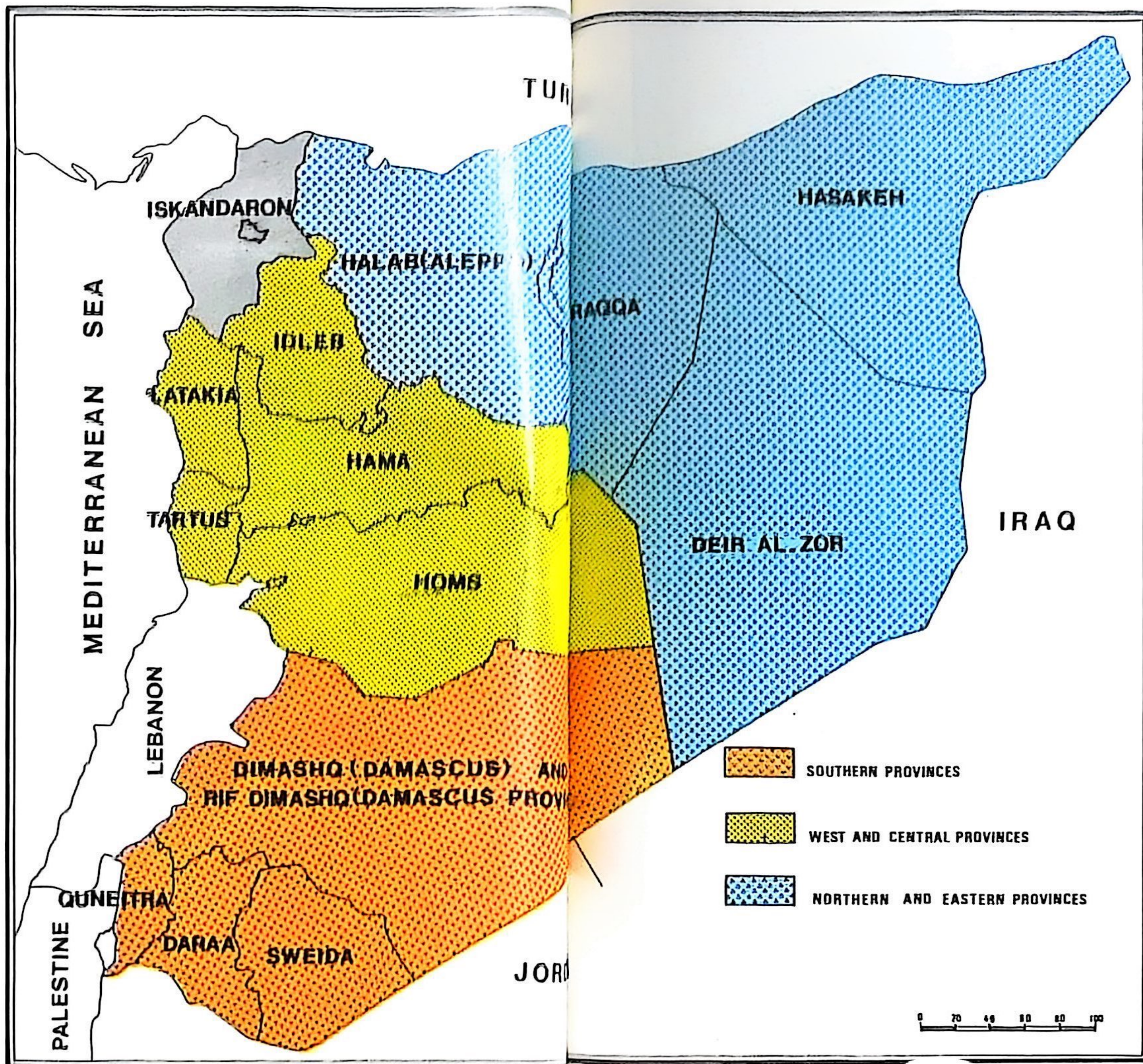
Syria is divided into 14 provinces, each one with a main city as its centre.

These provinces can be divided into 3 areas:

The Southern Provinces: the city of Damascus, the Damascus Province, Sweida, Dar'a, and Quneitra.

The Mid-Western Provinces: Homs, Hama, Tartus, Latakia, and Idleb.

The North-Eastern Provinces: Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir al-Zor, and al-Hasakeh.



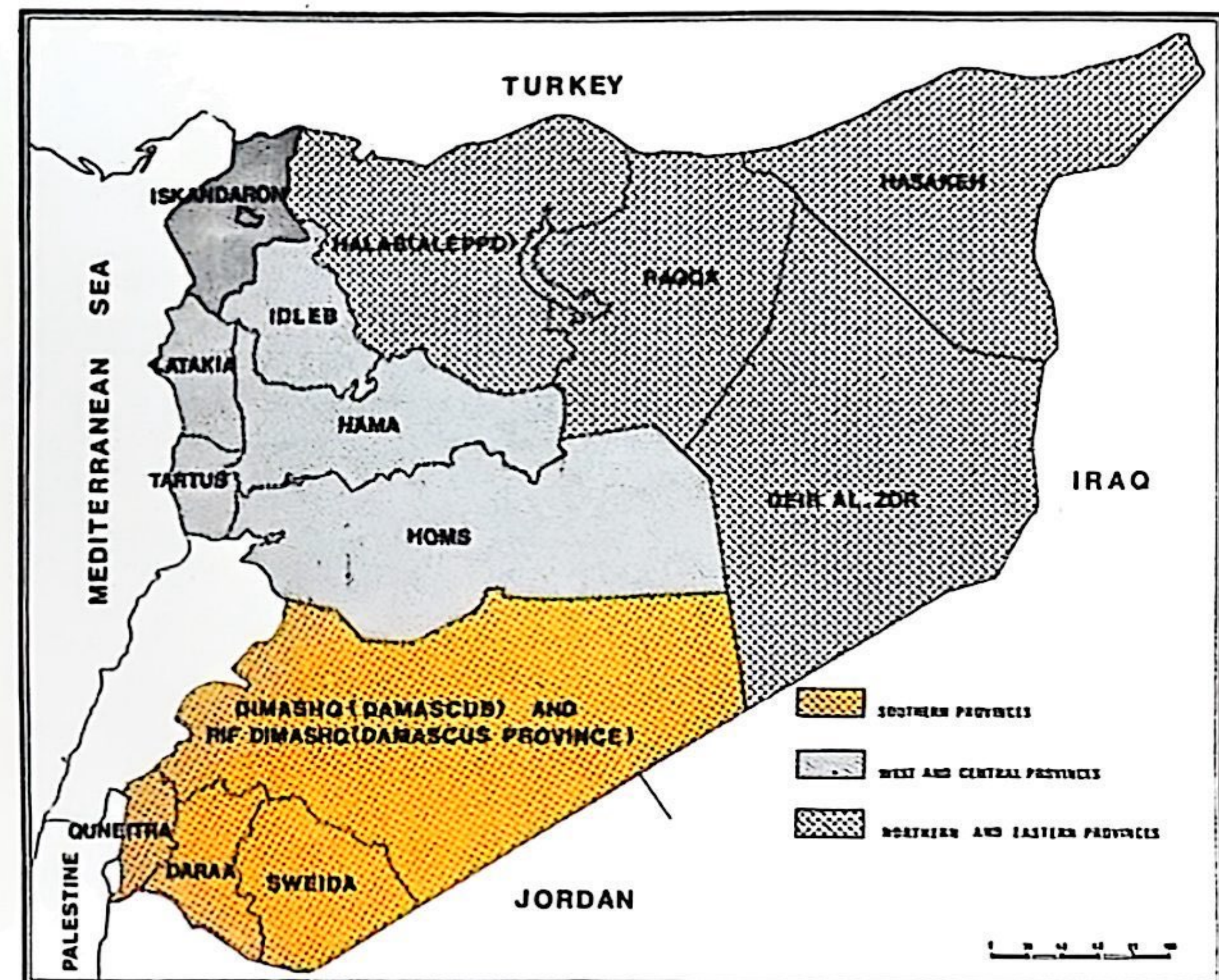


Mosaics from the Omyyad Mosque

SOUTHERN PROVINCES

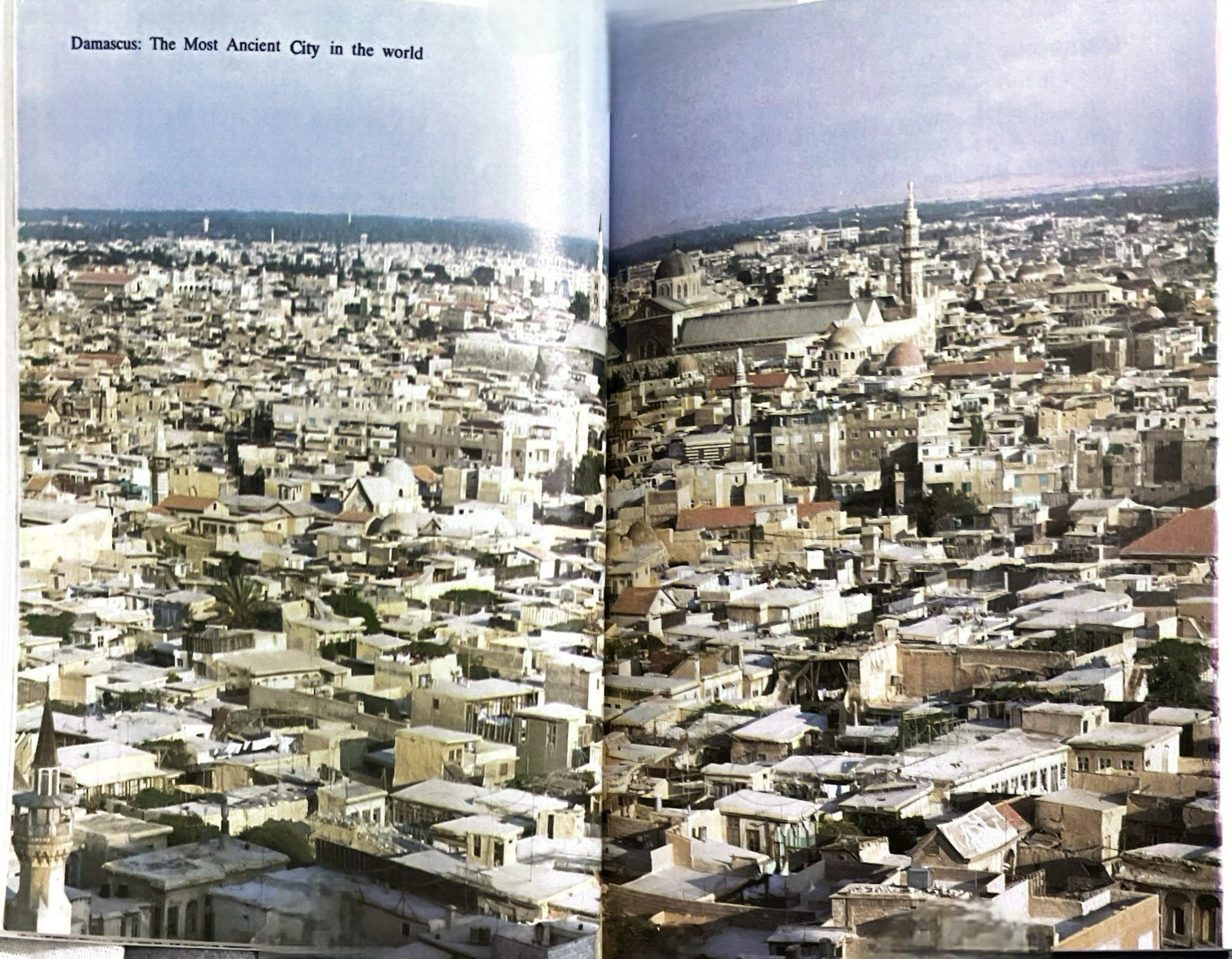
THE CITY OF DAMASCUS
THE DAMASCUS PROVINCE

SWEIDA
DARA'A
QUNEITRA



1 2 3 4 5 6

Damascus: The Most Ancient City in the world



Damascus

Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. It has occupied a position of importance in the fields of science, culture, politics, art commerce, and industry from the earliest times. It has been called 'al-Fayha' (the 'fragrant city'), al-Sham, Jolraq, and 'Pearl of the Orient' as the Emperor Julian named it. It was mentioned in the Holy Qur'an as 'the many-columned city of Aram, whose like has never been built in the land.

Early references to the city, such as those in the Ebla tablets, confirm that 'Dameski' (i.e. Damascus) during the third millennium B.C. was as a city of immense economic influence. Ancient Pharaonic scripts refer to it as 'Dameska'. It enjoyed great prominence during the second millennium B.C. as the centre of an Aramaic kingdom under the name of 'Dar-misiq' ('the irrigated house'). The Aramites were the original inhabitants of Damascus, and their language was Syriac. Many villages around Damascus are still known by their Aramaic names.

Damascus fell under the domination of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Byzantines. They all left their mark on the city as visitors can still readily observe today. In the Roman era, Damascus was first among the ten most prominent cities. It received many privileges, especially during the reign of the Syrian dynasty of Roman emperors. It was from Damascus that the most talented architect of the Roman Empire came. This was Apolodor the Damascene, who

designed the celebrated Trajan Column in Rome, and the great bridge on the River Danube. Part of the heritage of this era are the remains of the city-plan which Apolodor designed in oblong shape according with Roman architectural style. There is also part of the Roman temple of Jupiter, which was erected on the site of an older Aramaic temple (Hadad) where the Omayyad Mosque stands today. This part of the temple is distinguished by its huge Corinthian columns with their richly decorated capitals.

In the Byzantine era, a great number of churches and monasteries were built, and most of them have survived to the present.

Damascus became the capital of the first Arab state at the time of the Omayyads in 661 A.D. This marked the beginning of its golden epoch, and for a whole century it was the centre of the youthful Islamic Empire. This reached its peak of expansion during this period, and came to stretch from the shores of the Atlantic and the Pyrennese in the west, to the river Indus and China in the east. The Omayyads took a genuine interest in building up the city, organizing its souqs and districts, improving its water supply and erecting palaces and hospitals in various parts of it.

Following the decline and fall of the Omayyads, Damascus went through a period of neglect and deterioration. It suffered disaster and destruction, seeing only temporary prosperity, depending on whose domination it was subjected to.

However, when Independence was achieved in 1946, the city started to regain its importance as a

significant cultural and political centre in the Arab world. When President Hafez al-Assad became leader of the country in 1970, an immense process of modernization started in the fields of construction and development. As has Syria, Damascus has now recovered its status at the heart of Arab and international affairs.

Visiting Damascus

It is impossible to enumerate all the places of interest in Damascus. The city is a living museum spanning thousands of years. One can only review the most important landmarks in the old part (within city-walls) and the new part (outside city-walls) of the city.

Landmarks of Old Damascus

1- The Wall and Gates:

The Wall was built in the Roman era with large, tapered stones. It was oblong in shape, designed in the manner of Roman military camps, cities, and fortifications. There are seven gates in it: Bab Sharqi, Bab al-Jabieh, Bab Keissan, Bab al-Saghir, Bab Tuma, Bab al-Jeniq, and Bab al-Faradiss. The main thoroughfare traversed the city from Bab al-Jabieh to Bab Sharqi; on both sides there were Corinthian columns, and across it numerous triumphal arches. But this thoroughfare has been submerged over the years to about six metres underground, and has been superseded by Souq al-Tawil or Midhat Pasha, under which are occasionally

discovered some Roman columns, especially when road works are in progress.

One such discovery was made in 1950 when a triumphal arch was found at Bab Sharqi, brought up to street level, and re-erected after its restoration was completed.

At the time of the Islamic conquest in 635 A.D., the Wall was still solid and impregnable, so the two Muslim leaders Khaled ibn al-Walid and Abu Obeida ibn al-Jarrah entered the city through Bab Sharqi and Bab al-Jabieh respectively. Thus the Wall was preserved, and remained intact throughout the Omayyad era. But when the Abassids stormed Damascus in 750 A.D., they destroyed large parts of it. It began to deteriorate over the years so much, so



Al-Tikiyeh al-Sulaimaniyeh



- City map of old Damascus

that it became oval in shape. But it was partly restored and reinforced at the time of the Nourites and Ayoubites, in order to withstand the attacks of the Crusaders. During Ottoman rule, however, it was neglected altogether, and some masonry was removed for use in other buildings; later on, numerous houses were built upon the greater expanse of it.

The only part of historic significance still standing in its original form is 500-metres long, and stretches from Bab al-Salaam to Bab Tuma. Most of the gates are still there, although much altered by additions and engravings done over the years. Other gates were made during the Islamic era, such as Bab al-Salaam and Bab al-Faraj which were built by Nureddin. Bab Keissan and Bab al-Jeniq were blocked up; and Bab al-Nasr, which had stood next to al-Qal'a (the castle) was removed when Souq al-Hamidiyeh was built in 1863. The remaining towers on the Wall are: The Nureddin Tower to the south of Bab Tuma, and al-Saleh Ayoub Tower to the east.

2- The Omayyad Mosque

This Great Mosque stands at the heart of the Old City at the end of Souq al-Hamidiyeh. It was built by the Omayyad Caliph al-Walid ibn Abdul Malek in 705 A.D. when Damascus was the capital of the Arab Islamic Empire.

It was constructed on the site of what has always been a place of worship: first, a temple for Hadad, the Aramean god of the ancient Syrians three thousand years ago; then, a pagan temple (the temple of Jupiter the Damascene) during the Roman era. It was later

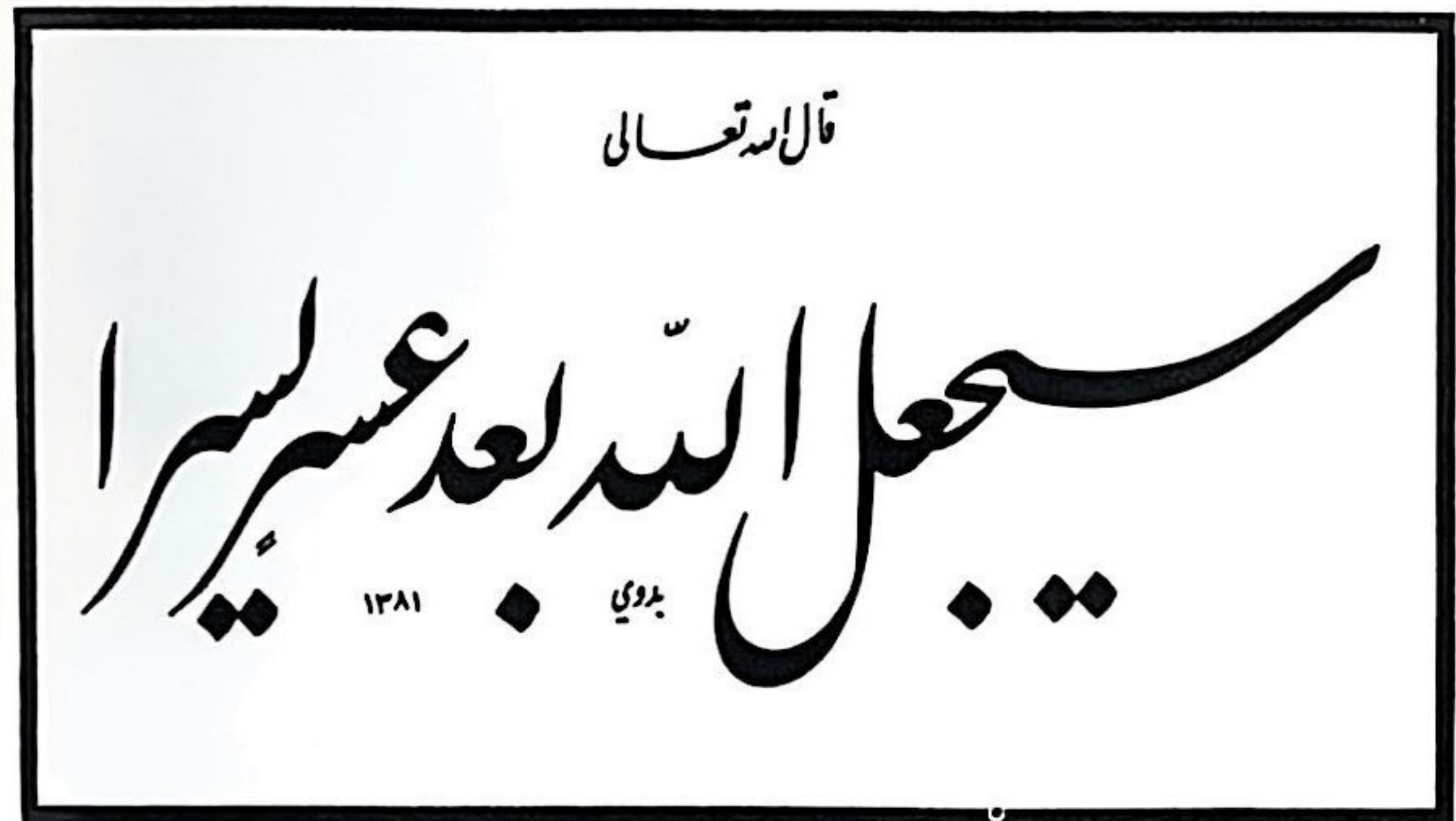
turned into a church called John the Baptist when Christianity spread in the fourth century. Following the Islamic conquest in 635, Muslims and Christians agreed to partition it between them, and they began to perform their rituals side by side.

When al-Walid decided to erect an impressive mosque suited to the grandeur of the Arab state 'whose like was never built before, nor will ever be built after' as he is reported to have said, he negotiated with the Christian community of Damascus, and undertook to construct a new church for them (St. John's) and allot several pieces of land for other churches, if they relinquished their right to their part of the Mosque. They agreed. It took ten years and eleven million gold dinars, as well as a huge number of masons, artists, builders, carpenters, marble-layers, and painters to complete. It became an architectural model for hundreds of mosques throughout the Islamic world.

A prominent feature of it are the three minarets built in different styles; the upper parts of which were renovated during the Ayoubite, Mamluk, and Ottoman eras. The mosque has a large prayer hall and an enormous courtyard. The interior walls are covered with mosaic panels, made of coloured and gilded glass, portraying scenes from nature. The dome is greyish-blue, celebrated for its magnificence. The prayer hall contains a domed shrine venerated by both Christians and Muslims, the tomb of St. John the Baptist.



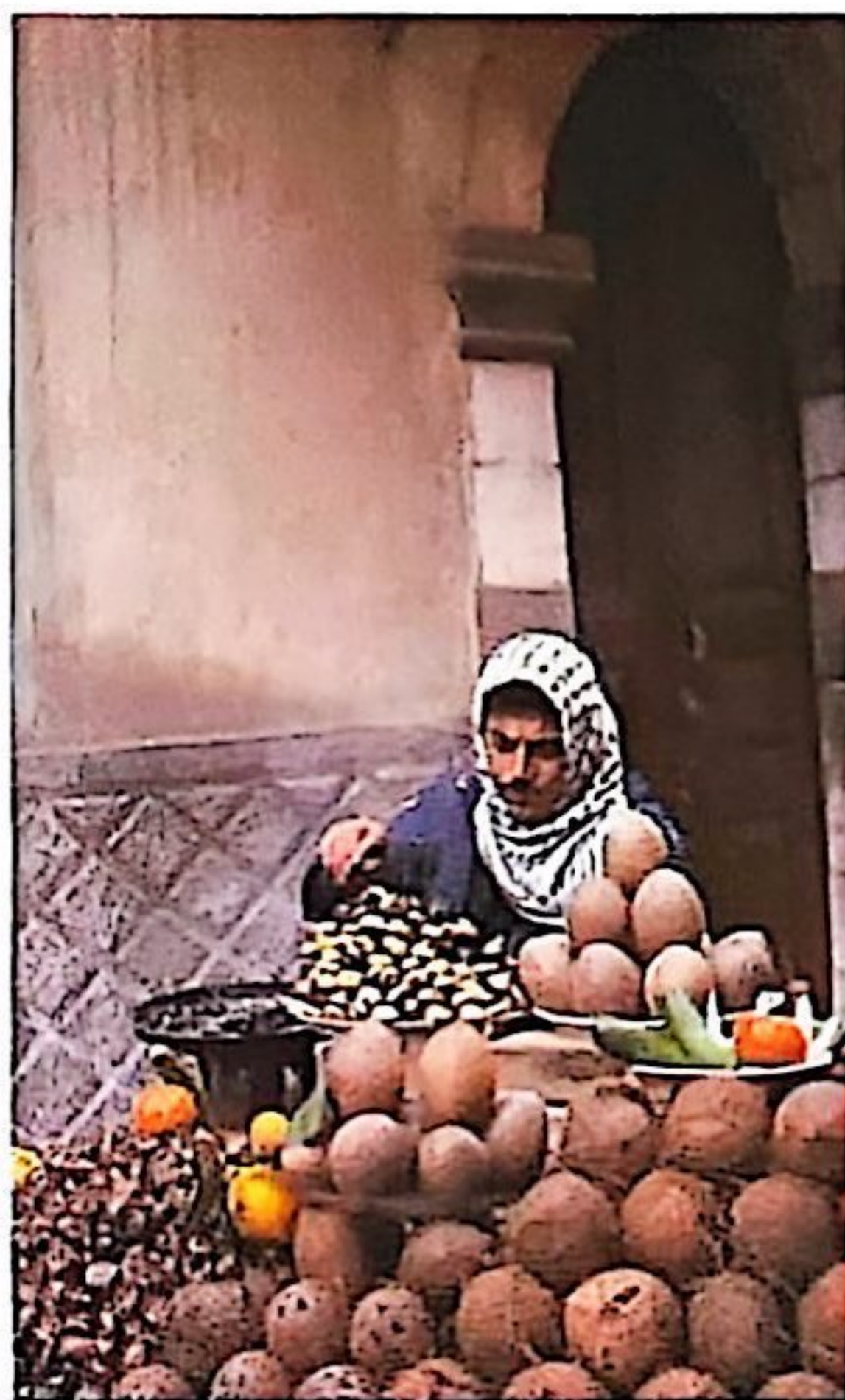
The Omayyad Mosque



The Art of Calligraphy by Mamduh and Badawi

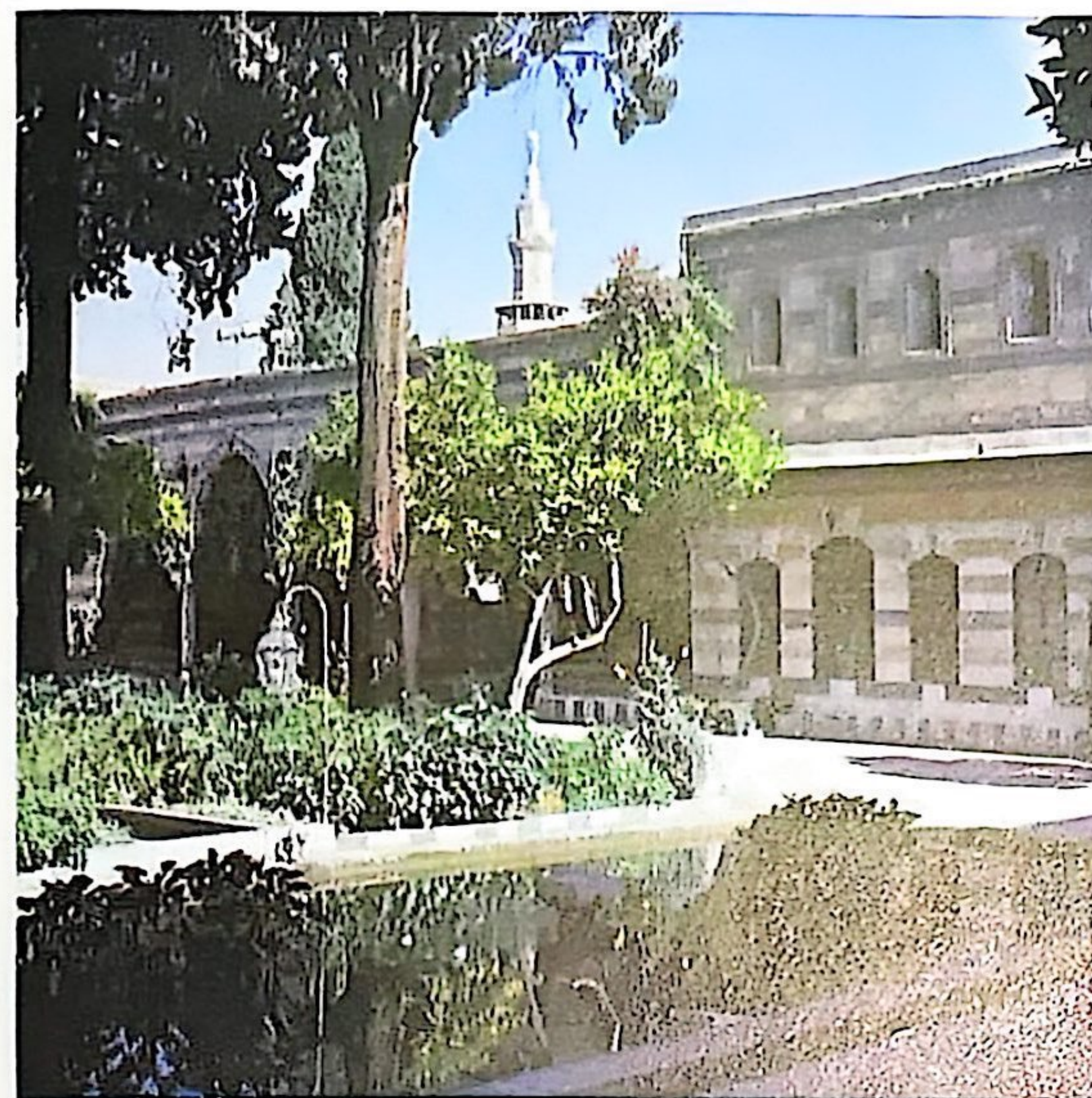


Scenes from Damascus

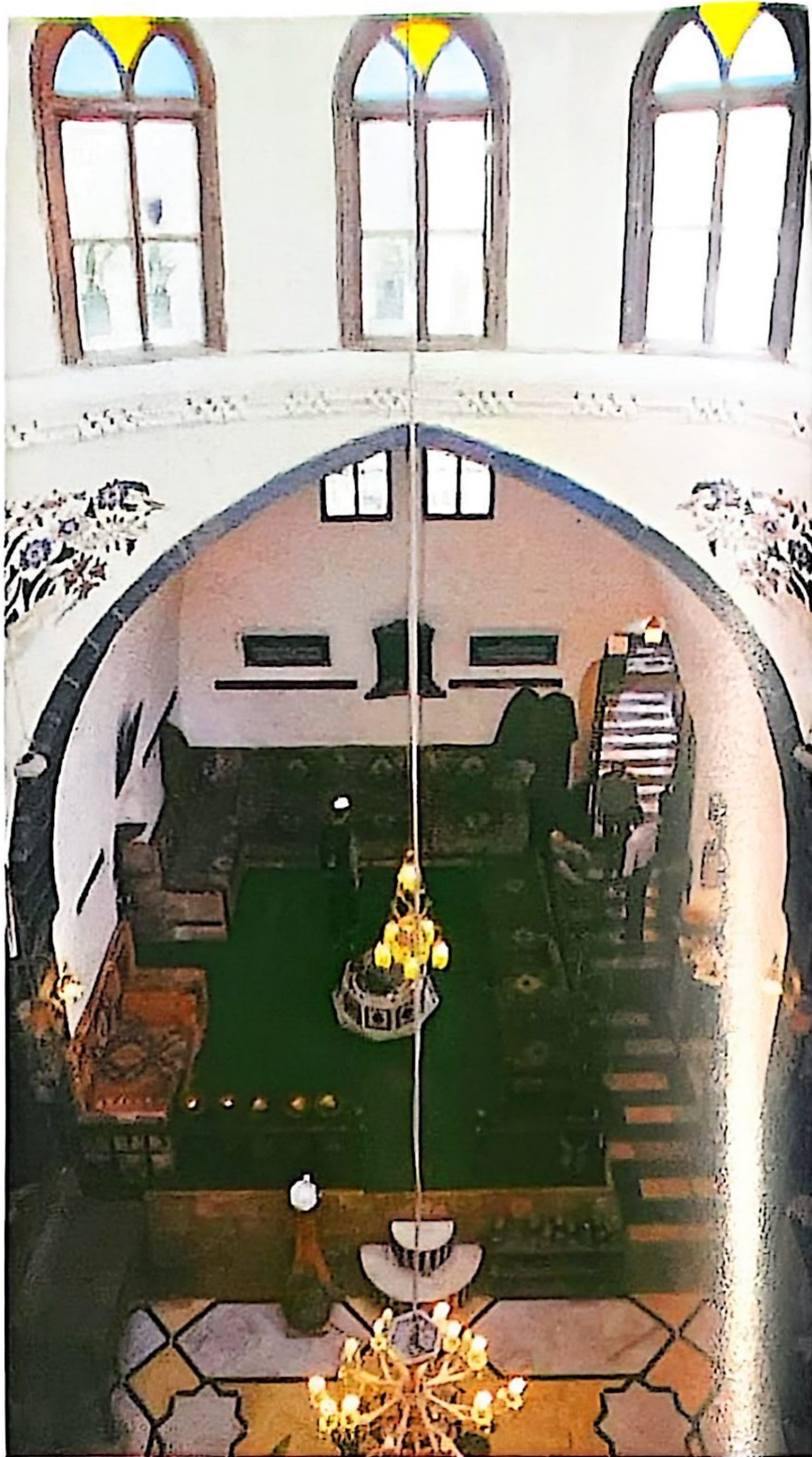


3- The Azem Palace

This also stands at the heart of the Old City, on the southern side of the Omayyad Mosque, and very close to it. It is an astonishing example of a Damascene house, where the simple, almost primitive, exterior contrasts rather sharply with the beauty and sophistication of the interior. Here one finds a sense of space, a wealth of polychrome stone, splendid marble, cascading fountains, and fragrant flowers. The palace was built in the mid-eighteenth century for the Governor of Damascus. The palace now houses the Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions.



The Azem Palace Courtyard



A Damascus Bath

4- The Damascus Citadel

The only fortress in Syria built on the same level as the city, it does not top a hill or a mountain like all other castles and citadels. It was erected by the Seljuks in 1078 A.D. with masonry taken from the city wall, and turned into a heavily-fortified citadel surrounded by walls, towers, a moat and trenches. Inside, they built houses, baths, mosques, and schools; it was a city within a city. At the height of Crusader raids and attacks, it was used as residence for the sultans of Egypt and Syria such as Nureddin, Saladin, and al-Malek al-Adel, whence they supervised military operations against the Crusaders. But al-Malek al-Adel soon found that it was no longer adequate for defence against contemporary weapons and siege tactics, so he decided in 1202 to demolish and re-build it. The outcome was an impressive modern citadel, incorporating the latest inventions in the martial arts. It had imposing walls and a dozen colossal turrets surrounding it; there were three-hundred arrow slits and enormous parapets all round. In the mid-thirteenth century, however, it was the principal target for Tatar and Mongol attacks, and was later neglected by the Ottomans. The moats and trenches around it were filled up, and the souqs of Hamidiyeh, Asrounieh, and al-Khuja were built thereon. Recently, the latter was demolished, and the western walls of the fortress came into full view. Extensive repair and restoration work is under way at the moment; when completed the citadel will become a war museum, and a centre for various cultural activities.

5- The Souqs

The old covered souqs of Damascus have a unique flavour you can savour with eyes closed. As you walk about in the warm darkness of these streets with their fragrant scents, spices, and colourful merchandise spilling out of the shops onto the pavements, you enter the strange world of exotic legends. Most prominent of these souqs are:

Souq al-Hamidiyeh

Follows a straight line from the west (where Bab al-Nasr used to be) to the Omayyad Mosque. It dates back to 1863, to the rule of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid, after whom the souq was called. It is covered with high iron vaulting, so old that sun rays filter through it into the darkness of the souq. The shops here sell everything from tissues to leather-work, from sweets and ice-cream to exquisite handmade brocades, mosaic, and copper inlaid with silver.

souq Midhat Pasha

(The Long Souq): Founded by the governor of Damascus Midhat Pasha in 1878. It stands above the Roman 'Street Called Straight' which used to traverse the city from Bab al-Jabieh to Bab Sharqi, and runs parallel to Souq al-Hamidiyeh, with numerous side-souqs separating them.

On both sides of the Souq the shops are filled with local textiles, silk cloth, woollen cloaks, headbands and skull caps; there are also ancient khans (inns) whose entrances and archways house an endless number of other smaller shops. One half of the souq



Souq al-Hamidiyeh

(the part closer to Bab Sharqi) is uncovered, and is well-known for its coppersmiths, engraved copper products, and silver inlaid utensils. Some archeologists say this is the location where Damascus first came into being thousands of years ago. In one of the side streets in this part, Maktab 'Anbar is situated. This is the most exquisite of Damascene houses built in the nineteenth century. In 1887 it was turned into a secondary school, and continued functioning throughout the Ottoman and French periods. It was repaired and restored recently to become a cultural centre. It contains some of the most striking tinted glass windows, spacious patios, ornamented halls and painted ceilings.

At the end of this Souq, just before Bab Sharqi, there are several beautiful churches, such as the Hananiya Church, which dates back to the Byzantine era, and the N'assan House, which represents a typical old Damascene house.

Souq al-Harir

Founded by Darwish Pasha in 1574. Its entrance is at the end of Souq al-Hamidiyeh just outside the Omayyad Mosque. Its shops are filled with local embroidered cloths, perfume essence, and tailoring and sewing requisites. Here, too, a number of old khans have been converted into shops, best known for their cloaks, capes, mantles, shawls, and 'galabiyas'. Most interesting of these clusters of little shops is an old bath called al-Qishani.

Souq al-Harir leads to yet another souq called al-

Khayatin (Tailors) which was founded by Shamsi Pasha in 1553; a multitude of shops here sell woollens and material for men's clothing. Hundreds of celebrated tailors of traditional wear used to work here in the past. Between these two souqs stands the mosque and tomb of the Muslim leader Nureddin ibn Zenki. The mosque was erected in 1173, and is distinguished by a dome of unequalled beauty, and interior and exterior designs of unique originality. Also between the two souqs stands Madrassat (school) Abdallah al-Azem, constructed in 1779, during the Ottoman period, which has also been converted into a cluster of small shops for traditional crafts.

Souq al-Bzourieh

Extends between Souq Midhat Pasha and the Omayyad Mosque and is famous for its quaint little



fruit, medicinal herbs, and confectionery.

In the middle of this souq stands a bath (one of the two hundred public baths) which has been in continuous use from the twelfth century. Here, too is the celebrated khan of As'ad Pasha built by the owner of al-Azem Palace in the mid-nineteenth century; it is now being converted into a hotel.



A Souq in Old Damascus

Another little souq branches out of al-Bzourieh; this is the Goldsmiths' Market, where an endless variety of hand-made jewellery is sold; the southern entrance to the Omayyad Mosque overlooks this glittering little souq.

Bimaristan al-Noury

To the south of Souq al-Hamidiyeh, this was built by Nureddin in the twelfth century as a hospital, and financed by ransom money to the amount of 300,000 dinars paid by a Crusader king held captive. During the Ottoman period it was converted into a school for girls, and it now houses the Museum of Arab Medicine and Science. It contains the most exquisite examples of decorative inscriptions used for the first time during Nureddin's reign to replace the traditional kufi inscriptions.

Saladin's Tomb and its Neighbouring Schools:

The tomb is next door to the north gate of the Omayyad Mosque. It was originally part of al-Azizieh School built by Uthman, Saladin's son, in the twelfth century. The whole interior is decorated with polychrome marble mosaics.

Next to the tomb stands a typical Mamluk edifice, the Jumaqjeh School, built in the twelfth century. The interior is decorated with inscriptions and beautiful lettering. It is one of the most splendid old schools in Damascus; and has recently been turned into a Museum of Arabic Calligraphy.

Two other schools stand nearby: al-Zahiriya, which is an Ayoubite edifice and houses the famous

library of that name; and al-Adliya, which is also Ayoubite in style, and is now headquarters of the Arab Language Academy.

St. Paul's Church

Is situated behind Bab Keissan, one of the gates in the old wall encircling Damascus.



A Painting of Saint Paul

It commemorates the memory of St. Paul, whose name was Saul of Tarsus, charged by the Romans to persecute the Christians. As he approached the village of Daraya, a burst of blinding light took his sight away, and he heard Jesus Christ ask him 'Saul, why do you persecute me?' This was a vision of faith. He was taken unconscious to Damascus, attended by Hananiya, Christ's disciple, and became one of the

staunchest advocates of Christianity. His Jewish peers decided to kill him, but he hid in a house by the city wall, and at night was lowered by his disciples in a huge basket from a slit in the wall. The church is located at the site of his escape. He travelled to Antioch, Athens, and Rome, after a brief stay in Jerusalem, and continued to teach the gospel until he died.

Landmarks of the New City

Ever since the eleventh century, when the old city was already too small for its inhabitants and their houses, the city started to expand beyond its walls. In the Nuri and Ayoubite periods new suburbs emerged; they were separate and independent of the city proper, but they, in turn, continued to grow at such a rate during the Mamluk period that they joined the wall, and the old city became indistinguishable from the new. Most notable among the suburbs was al-Salhieh at the foot of Jabal Qassiun, al-Uqiba, al-Midan, and al-Mazzeh. Mamluk princes and sultans also erected numerous schools and mosques beyond the old city walls. During the Ottoman period four new edifices were constructed, namely: Sheikh Muhieddin, al-Takieh al-Suleimaniyeh, al-Darwishieh, and al-Sinanieh. In the nineteenth century, new roads were built across the city along with new residential areas. European architectural styles started to appear. Most important among the buildings of this period are: al-Hamidiyeh Barracks (where part of the University of Damascus stands

today), al-Saraya (now housing the Ministry of the Interior), al-Muhajirin Palace (the former Presidential Palace), the National Hospital, and the Law School (now being renovated to accommodate the Ministry of Tourism). Construction of new roads, bridges, hospitals, public parks, hotels, government offices, and new residential suburbs began after Independence and is still going strong today.

Places of interest to the visitor are:

1- The National Museum:

The National Museum of Damascus is generally recognized as one of the finest of its kind in the world. Visitors can see artefacts of the great civilizations that emerged and flourished in Syria. There are thousands of statues, stamps, pieces of jewellery, weapons,



Jewellery from the National Museum Collection

precious stones; sculpture, masks, tablets, textiles, mosaics, glass-work and earthenware, coins, and manuscripts from the ancient Syrian kingdoms of Ebla, Ugarit, Palmyra, Tel Sukas, Mari, Doura Europos, Bosra, Shahba and others. The main



Cuneiform from Ugarit (1500 B. C.)

sections of the Museum are:

■ **Oriental Antiquities:** (The Ugarit alphabet, gold, silver, and ivory statues, stamps, antiquities of the coastal and interior regions, the civilization of Mary, the statue of Ornina, ivory picture panels, jewellery, gold masks, and various weapons).

Classical, Greek and Roman Antiquities: (The Palmyra civilization, Doura Europos, mosaics, the Byzantine period, and basalt sculpture).

The Arab-Islamic Section: (The facade of Qasr al-Hir al-Gharbi, glass-work, ceramics, weapons, astrolabes, earthenware, coins, and manuscripts).



Jewellery Mold

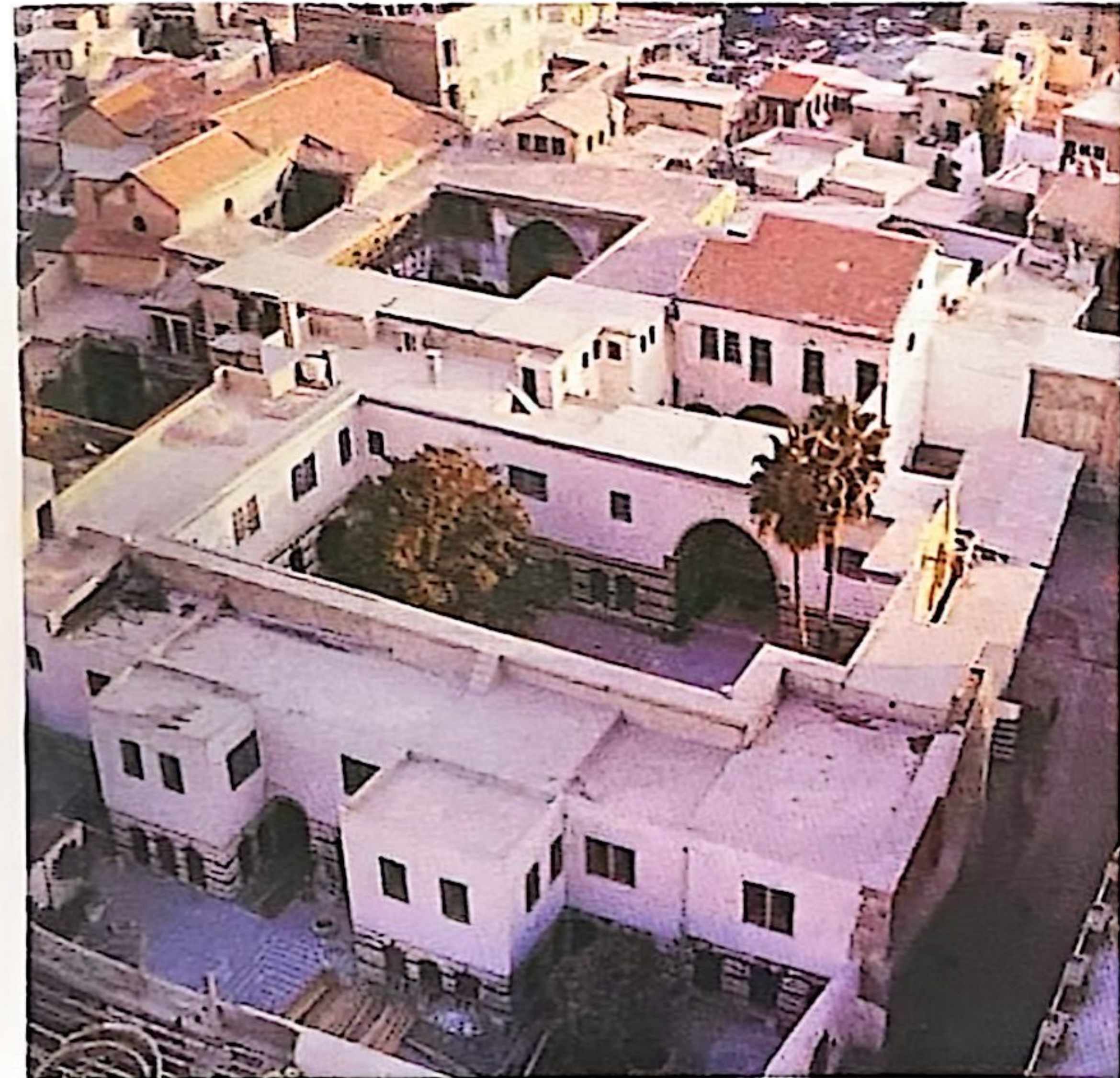
Modern Arts Section: (Work of contemporary Syrian artists since the 30's, paintings and sculpture).

2- al-Takieh al-Suleimaniyeh:

A remarkable example of Ottoman architecture; it was built by order of Sultan Suleiman al-Qanouni (hence the name) in 1554. It was erected on the site of the famous palace of Zaher Bybars, and designed by the celebrated architect Sinan. Most striking are its two elegant minarets. It is divided into two parts: the great Takieh which consists of a mosque and a school, and the minor Takieh with a prayer hall and a large patio surrounded by archways, arcades and rooms, now housing the handicraft market.

3. The City of Damascus Historical Museum:

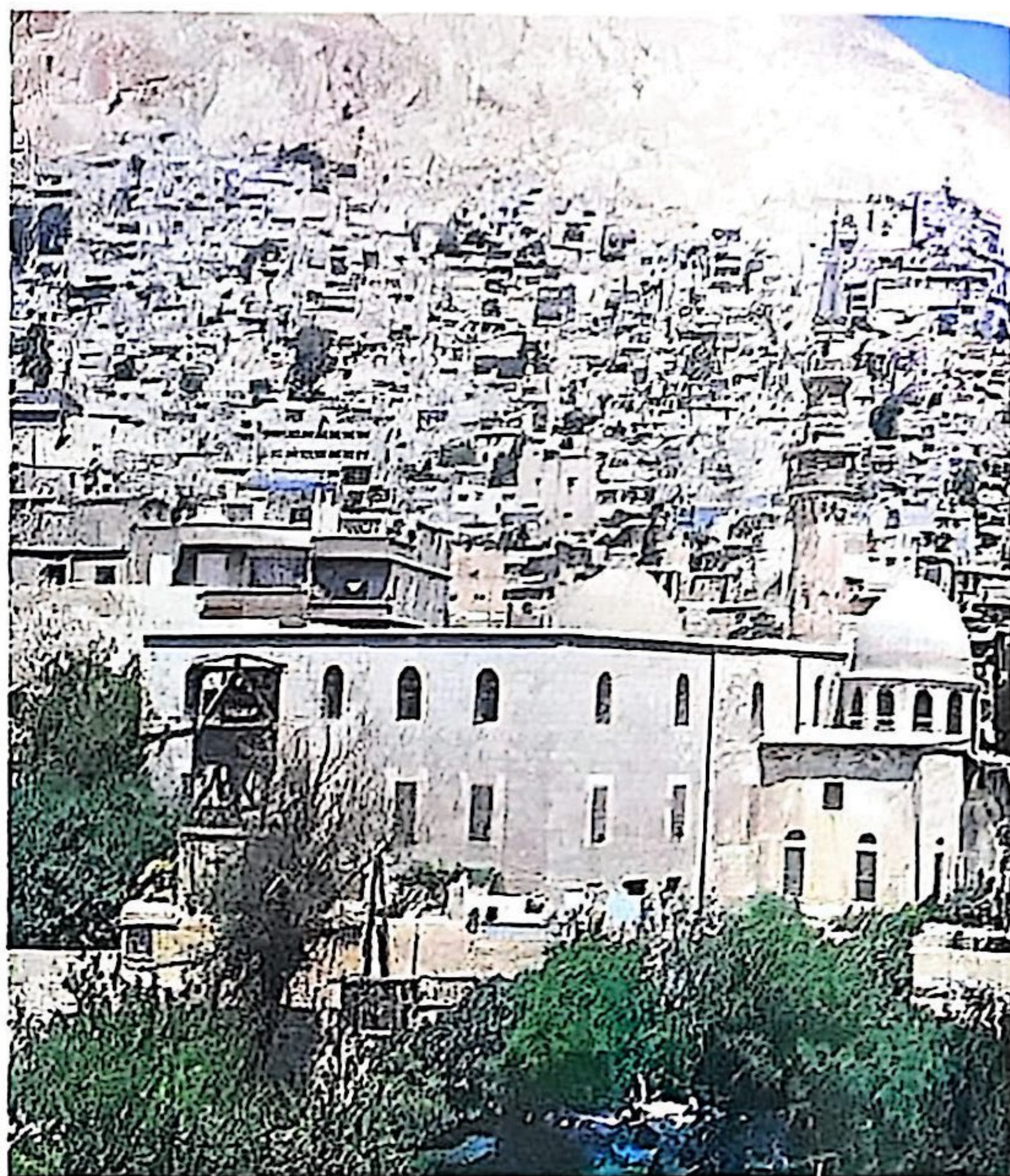
An eighteenth-century building, which, like al-Azem Palace, is considered a fine example of old Damascene houses. It contains historical documents relating to the inhabitants of the city of Damascus.



Damascus Historical Museum

4- al-Salhieh:

Situated at the foot of Mount Qassius which overlooks Damascus. Building in this area started in the eleventh century to accommodate refugees arriving from Jerusalem following the Crusader occupation of the city. Here you find numerous old



Salhie and Kassioun

schools and hospitals, as well as mosques and the shrines of prominent Muslim thinkers and Sufi leaders such as Muhieddin Ibn Arabi and Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi. In the Muhieddin district, a colossal wooden noria was erected in the thirteenth century, based on a design made by al-Jazri, the leading mechanic of his time. It lifted water from the river Yazid to a height of 12 metres to supply al-Qaimarieh Hospital at al-Salhieh. It is the only one remaining of a great many norias that were scattered all over the district. There is still an alley called the Noria Alley.

DAMASCUS

COUNTRYSIDE AND ENVIRONS

Places of interest to the visitor:

Ma'lula

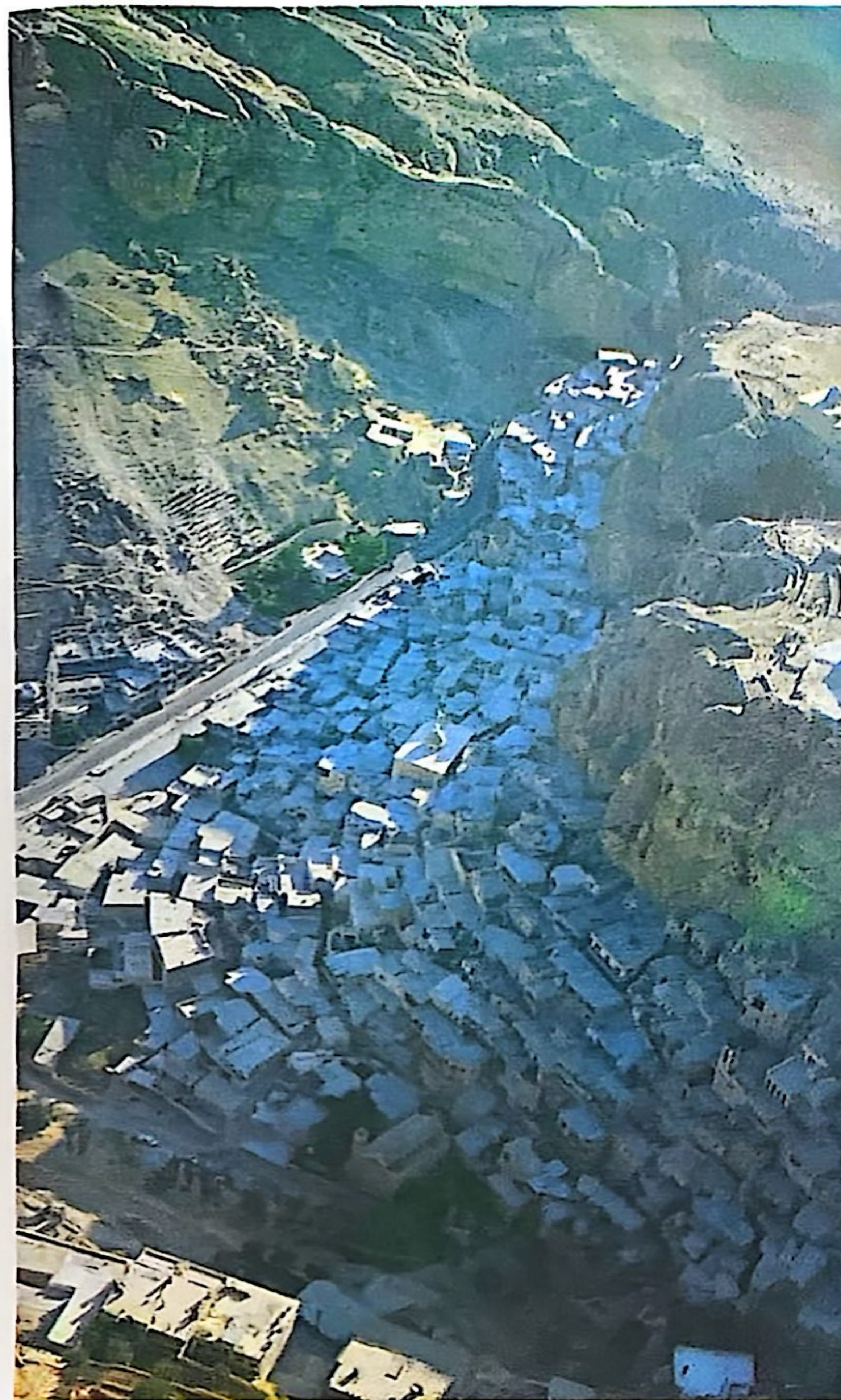
This famous village is some 56 kilometres from Damascus, and is situated at an altitude of more than 1500 metres. Its little houses cling to the face of an enormous rock; they look suspended in mid-air. There are two monasteries here: Saint Sergius and Saint Taqla's. The inhabitants still speak Aramaic, the language spoken by Christ. Two neighbouring villages, Jaba'din and Naj'a also speak the same language. The word Ma'lula means 'entrance' in Aramaic.

Seydnaya

Some 30 kilometres from Damascus, the village is spread out over a hilltop, and is surrounded by vineyards and olive groves. It has a famous monastery



- Seydnaya



Ma'lula

founded in 547, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. The name of the village itself, 'Seyda Naya' in Syriac means 'Our Lady'.

The monastery contains a portrait of the Virgin believed to have been painted by St. Luke.

Shrine of Saida Zeinab

Located some 10 kilometres to the south of Damascus. The interior is covered with decorations in silver and gold, ornate windows and lavish chandeliers. The shrine attracts hundreds of pilgrims daily from various countries, who come to pay tribute to the Prophet's grand-daughter, the daughter of the Imam Ali ibn Abi Taleb.



The Shrine of Saida Zainab

Summer Resorts and Recreation Spots:

Zabadani

A summer resort some 45 kilometres north of Damascus, 1175 metres above sea-level. It overlooks the plain of Zabadani, a fertile land with thousands of fruit trees bearing delicious apples, cherries, plums, peaches, and pears. The source of the river Barada is in this plain and it supplies Damascus with water, and irrigates the Ghuta around the city. The source of the river forms a little lake which is surrounded by cafes, restaurants, and play-grounds.



The Barada Source

Attracted by its fresh air and beautiful scenery, Damascenes rush to this resort on hot summer days. The area has many hotels and restaurants, cafes and camping sites situated near the banks of the river.



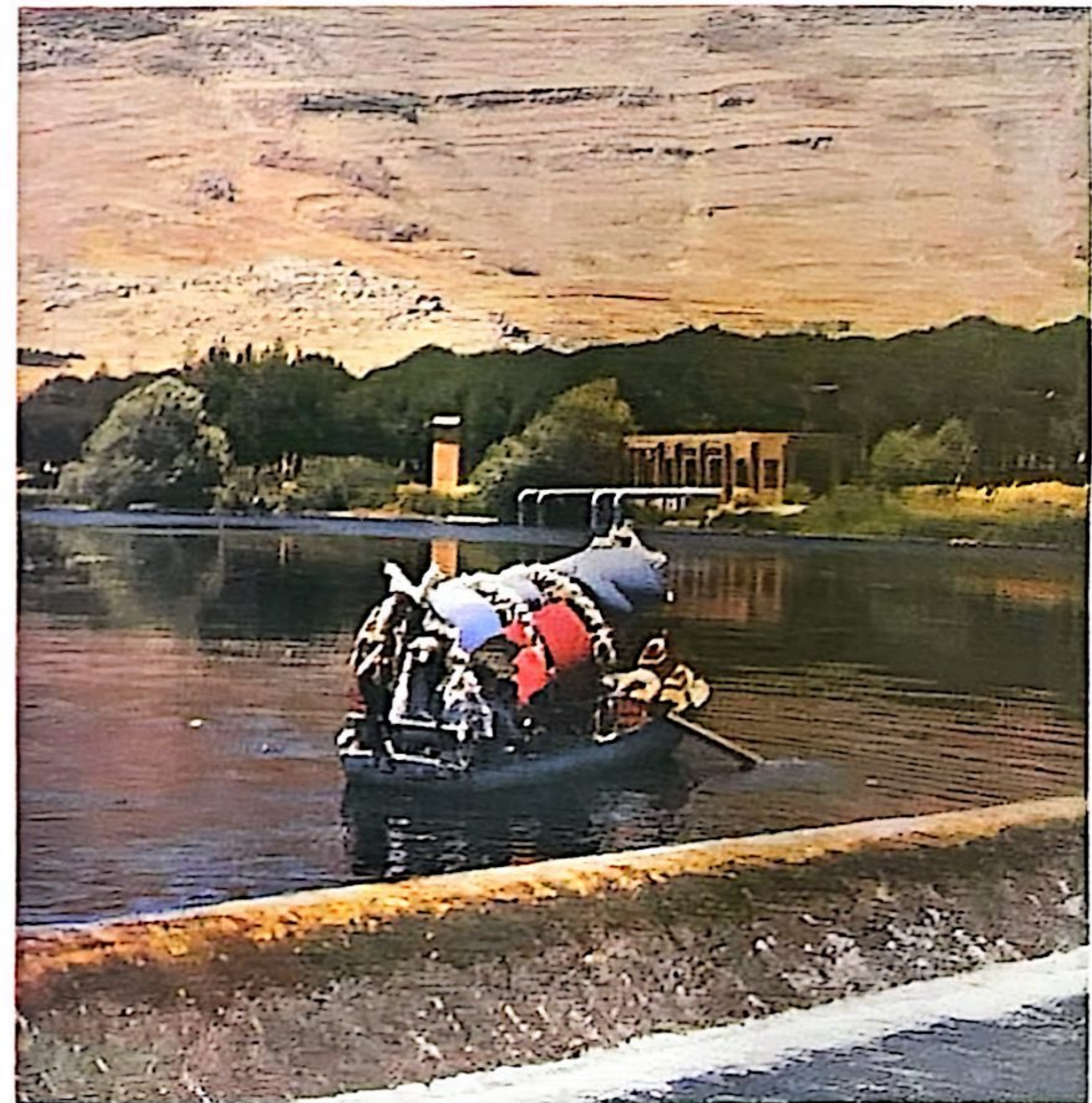
Bludan

Many Damascenes, however, prefer another nearby resort, Bludan, which spreads over the mountain overlooking Zabadani, at 1500 metres above sea-level. It is cooler here and the scenery is particularly impressive, especially at sunset. Here, too, plenty of hotels, restaurants and cafes cater to the needs of all visitors. Most notable among them is the Grand Hotel, with its spacious terrace that overlooks the entire Zabadani plain.

Also on the hill-top between Zabadani and Bludan, lies the village of Bugein with its famous mineral-spring gushing out of the hillside. It is customary for visitors to stop here and sample this fresh water. This is now bottled and sold in hotels, restaurants and shops throughout the Middle East.

Recreation spots near Damascus are numerous and varied. In the western Ghuta on the banks of the river Barada, you will find hundreds of them concealed under the shade of poplar and willow trees.

The main resting-spots in this valley are: Ein al-Fijeh, Ein al-Khadra, Basseemeh, al-Ashrafieh, al-Hameh, and al-Rabweh. The eastern Ghuta, where the International Airport is located, is also a most attractive part of the Damascus environs. It is full of fruit orchards with apricot, peach, apple, and pear trees.



A Picnic at the Barada Valley

Also a little to the north of Damascus there are two interesting villages, al-Tel and Mnein (1300 metres above sea level), well-known for their clear springs and pretty cafes.

The village of Erneh is some 52 kilometres from Damascus, suspended at 1400 metres above sea-level on the slopes of Mount Hermon. It has over 300 springs that converge to create al-A'waj River, and it is well-known for its delicious strawberries, cherries, apples and peaches.



The Ghuta

IMPORTANT SITES

IN

SOUTHERN PROVINCES

Bosra (Dara'a Province)

Situated in the vast Hawran plain, some 145 kilometres south of Damascus. It is an extremely ancient city mentioned in the lists of Tutmose III and Akhenaten in the fourteenth century B.C. The first Nabatean city in the second century B.C., it bore the name Buhora, but during the Hellenistic period, it was known by the name of Bustra. Later the Romans took an active interest in the city, and at the time of the Emperor Trajan it was made the capital of the Province of Arabia (in 106 B.C.) and was called Neatrajana Bustra. The city saw its greatest period of prosperity and expansion then, became a crossroads on the caravan routes and the official seat and residence of the Imperial Legate. After the decline of the Roman Empire, Bosra played a significant role in the history of early Christianity. It was also linked to the rise of Islam, when a Nestorian monk called Bahira, who lived in the city, met the young Muhammad when his caravan stopped at Bosra, and predicted his prophetic vocation and the faith he was going to initiate.

The oldest Islamic square minarets (still standing) are found in Bosra, whose prosperous role as an important halt for pilgrims on the way to Mecca lasted until the 17th century.

The most interesting part of the city today is the famous Roman theatre built in the second century A.D., which seats 15 thousand spectators, and is considered one of the most beautiful and well-preserved of Roman amphitheatres in the world. The



Bosra Amphitheatre

stage is 45 metres long and 8 metres deep. Every summer, it hosts Arab and international performers who entertain audiences during the Bosra Art Festival against a majestic background of Roman columns and arches.

The city itself contains a great number of Roman ruins, a part of the Byzantine Bahira Church, as well as the al-Mabrak Mosque, which is said to have been erected on the site where the Prophet's camel stopped to rest. There is also the Omar Mosque (also called the al-Arouss Mosque), which is the only one of its type remaining from the early days of Islam, and it retains its 7th century primitive form.

An important Muslim citadel, dating back to the Ayoubite and Mamluk period still stands, and one of its towers now houses a museum of Antiquities and Traditional Arts.

In addition, the city also has:

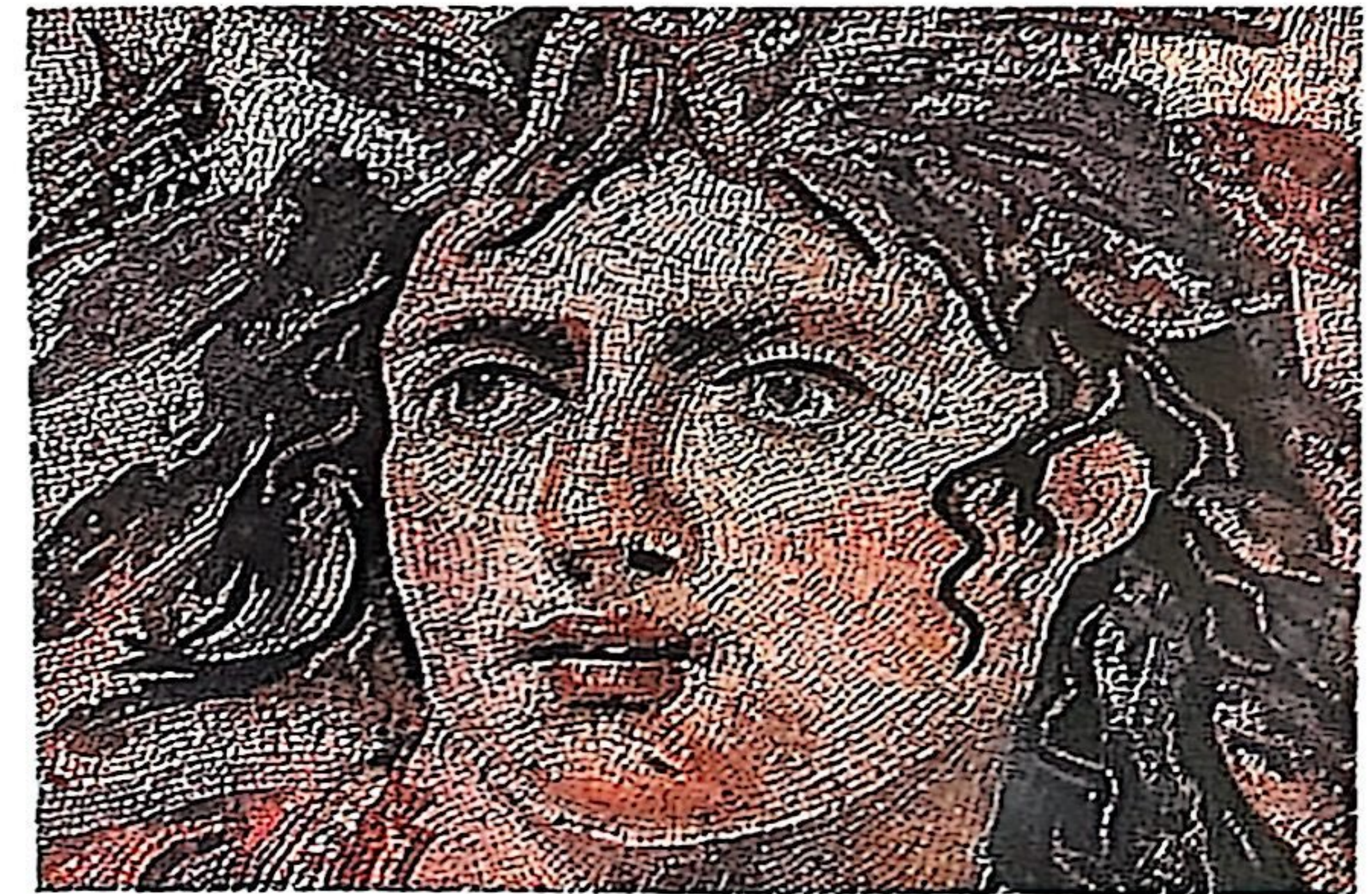
- Remains of walls (Nabatean);
- A triumphal arch (Roman, 3rd century);
- Baths (Roman, 2nd century);
- al-Birkeh (a huge pool: 155 by 122 metres) (Nabatean);
- A Nabatean temple dating back to the first century;
- A cathedral (Byzantine, 4th century);

Shahba (Sweida Province)

In the Jabal al-Arab region 90 kilometres south-east of Damascus. Shahba stands in an oasis of orchards and vineyards. Renowned as the birthplace of the Syrian Emperor Phillip who ruled the Roman Empire between 244 and 249 A.D. To honour him, the city bore the name Phillipopolis during the Roman period. He took a personal interest in the city, planned it after the Roman style, built numerous palaces and temples in it, erected triumphal arches and public baths, a theatre and a great wall surrounding it. He is said to

have wanted to turn Shahba into a replica of Rome itself.

Visitors to the Shahba museum can see the immense mosaic panels representing ancient Greek myths; the god of wine and fertility Dionysus, the goddess of love and beauty Aphrodite, and the legendary poet and musician Orpheus. Another collection of Shahba's mosaic panels is in the National Museum in Damascus.



The Thetis Mosaic (Shahba Museum)

Remains of the city temple (Philipon), some public baths, parts of the old wall and its four gates, as well as the two intersecting thoroughfares and the Roman Canal can still be seen in the town.

Salkhad (Sweida Province)

Some 38 kilometres south of Sweida and 20 km east of Bosra. Here you find:

- Remains of a citadel built by the Nabateans on a volcanic hill; it was renovated by the Ayoubites and Mamluks who added watch-towers to the original building.
- The minaret of an Ayoubite mosque in the town square.
- An Ayoubite tomb with stones inscribed with Arabic lettering.

Tel Shehab (Dara'a Province)

Famous for its water-falls which flow into Wadi Khalid, and the remains of its ancient wall.

Qanawat (Sweida Province)

7 kilometres east of Sweida, it was a city of great importance during the Roman period. In the year 60 B.C., the Romans named it one of the Decapolis League of commercial cities of which Damascus was chief city. This position of importance explains the abundance and richness of its ruins which are among the most interesting in the whole Jabal al-Arab region.

The location of Qanawat lends beauty to its remains; the village lies stretched along the crest of a hill and extends down the side of a valley full of trees, orchards, meadows and fields.

Of greatest interest to the visitor is a cluster of columns which were part of a 2nd century temple dedicated to the sun god Helios. Another temple of the same period dedicated to Zeus was built with decorated basalt. Of this temple there are only six columns left. On the right side of the valley there are the remains of an Odeon.

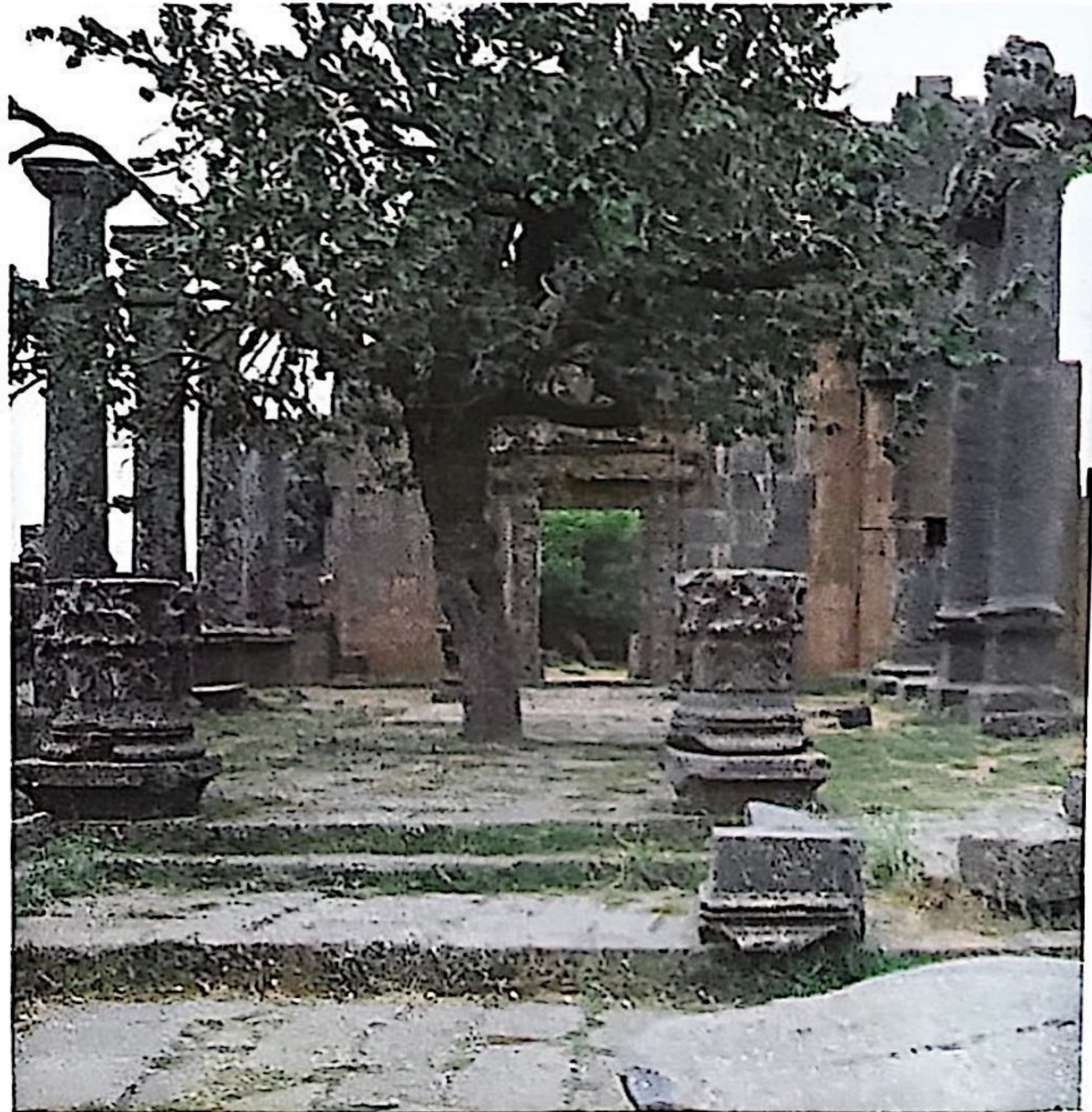


Qanawat Ruins

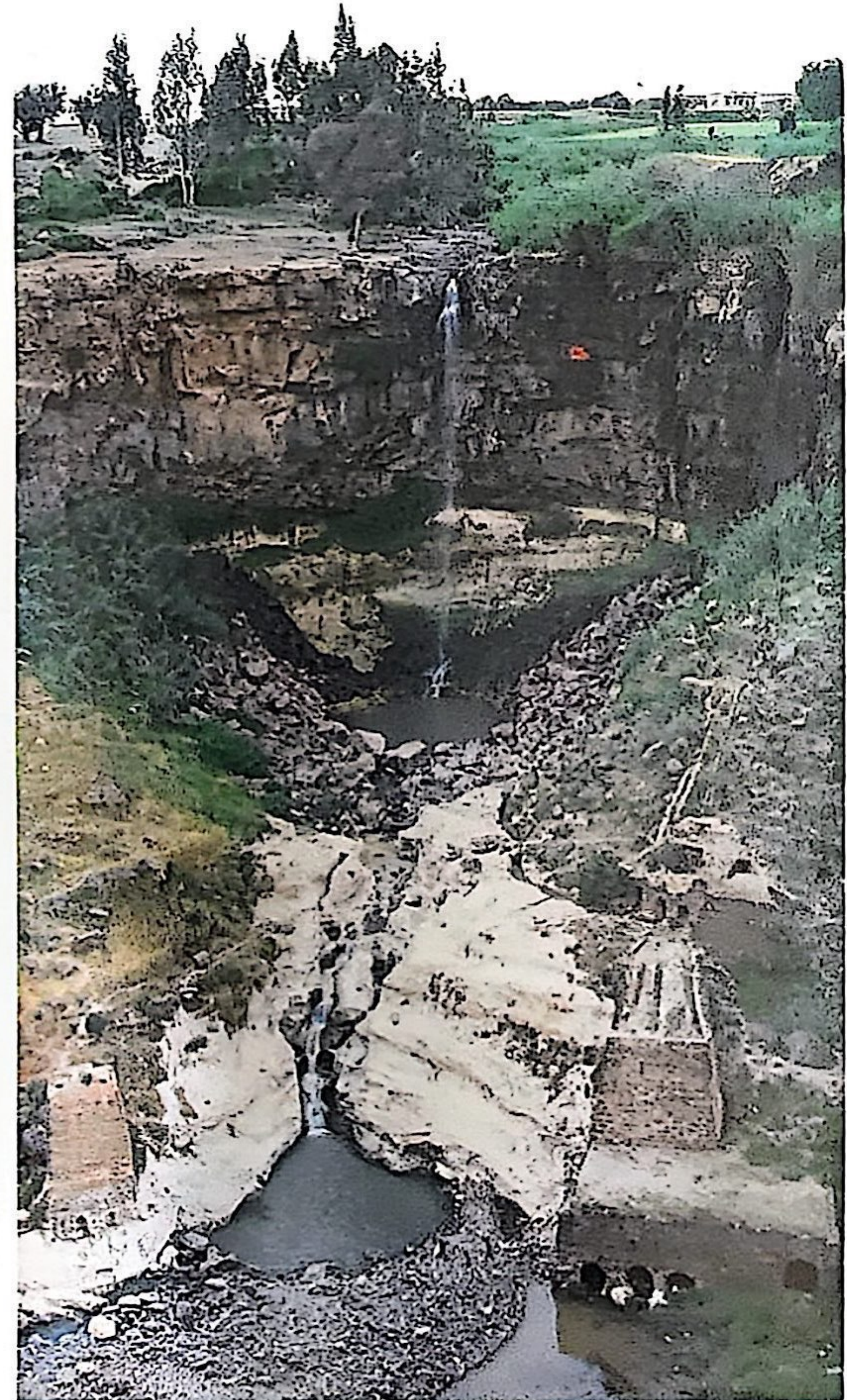
Sweida (Principal Town in the Province)

Situated some 90 kilometres south-east of Damascus, it is well-known for its plentiful vineyards. It stands 1100 metres above sea-level, and was known by the name of Suwada (little black town) in the Nabatean period, because it was built with black volcanic stone. The Romans, in the 3rd century, considered it one of the most important towns in the Province of Arabia and called it Dionysus.

Ruins of ancient civilizations are numerous but widely scattered; some of the most notable of these,



Qanawat



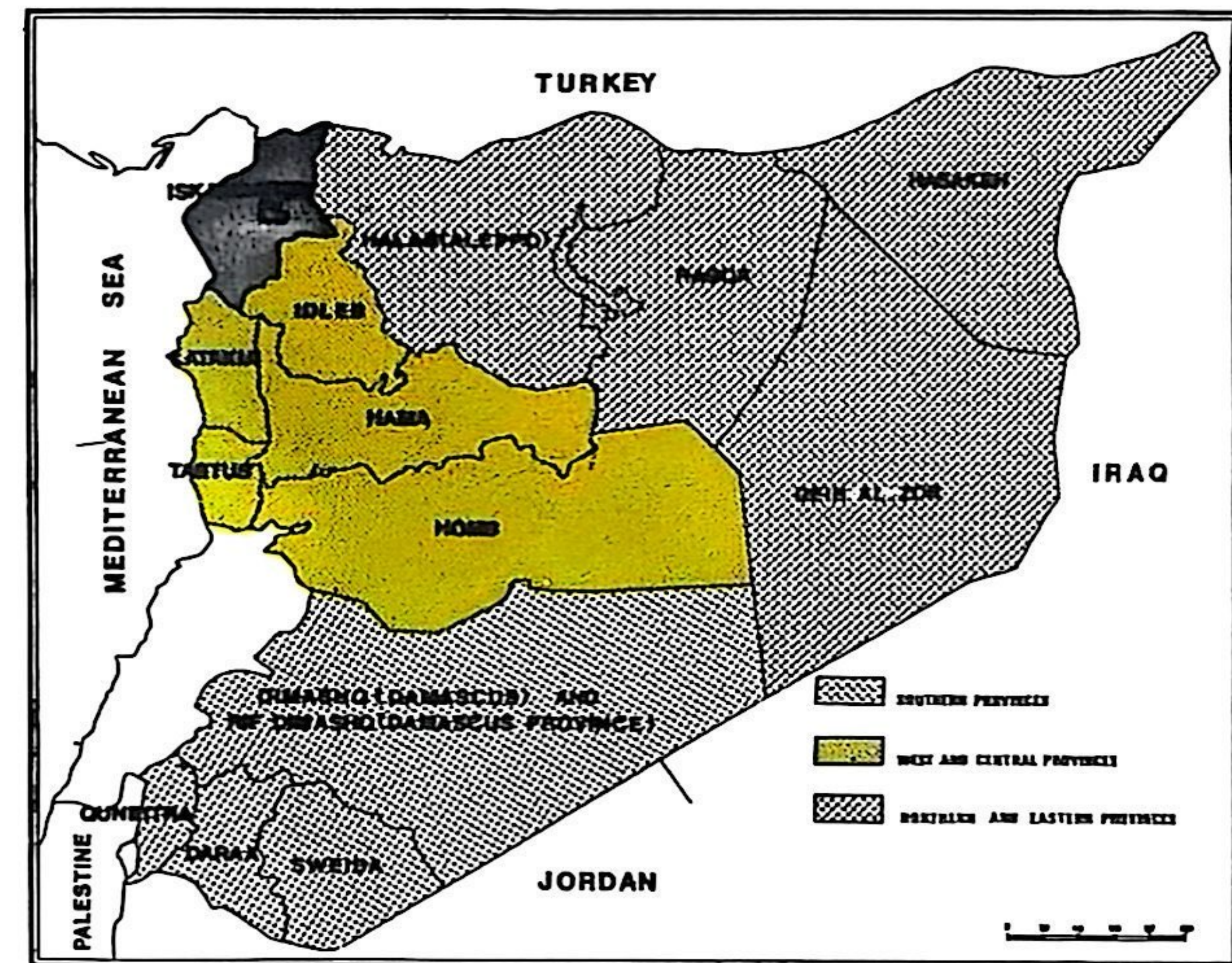
Tel Shihab Falls

along with a collection of exquisite mosaics discovered in 1962, are now housed in the Sweida Museum. One part of this mosaic collection represents Artemis, goddess of chastity and the hunt, surrounded by her nymphs when she is surprised by a hunter while bathing. This fine Roman work dates back to the sixth century. Another scene portrays the birth of Venus and the wedding of Thetis. Statues carved in hard basalt show signs of a mixture of Nabatean, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Arab influences.

There are also the ruins of a 3rd century Roman temple surrounded by a colonnade of Corinthian columns.

WEST AND CENTRAL, PROVINCES

HOMS
HAMA
LATAKIA
TARTUS
IDLEB



Homs

Homs is the third most important city in Syria. It lies 160km to the north of Damascus. Like Petra and Palmyra, Homos was an Arab emirate in the 2nd century B.C. It was also the third station on the 'Silk route' after Doura Europos and Palmyra.

It still retains this position of importance today, as the oil pipelines pass through the city.

Unfortunately, many buildings and citadels in Homos were destroyed by ancient earthquakes. There remains only one citadel in the south of the city with its Damascus and Palmyra gates.



Khalid ibn al-Walid Mosque

This historical city produced many impressive personalities. Bassianos (an emir of Homos), through his daughter's marriage to the Roman emperor, Septimius Severus, who ruled Rome from 193 to 211, sired three rulers, Caracalla, Heliogabalus and Alexander Severus. The city was the birthplace of the famous Syrian philosopher, Longinus, counsellor to Queen Zenobia, and of the famous physician, Marlian.

Among the most significant historic constructions remaining in Homos is the mosque of Khalid ibn al-Walid, the great commander of the Muslim Arab armies. Two very tall white-stone minarets lend lightness to the imposing structure. The slender colonnade in black and white stone in horizontal rows is representative of traditional Syrian architecture.

Many churches still stand in Homos from the days of early Christianity in Syria. One of these churches is said to possess the girdle of the Blessed Virgin. The church of St. Elian is unique for its collection of fine frescoes discovered in 1970. These bear inscriptions in Greek and Arabic, and date back to the end of the 12th century. The Nuri mosque also dates back to the 12th century, distinguished for its beautiful entrance.

In the Homos museum, there are many archaeological artefacts dating back to the ancient Syrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Arab eras.

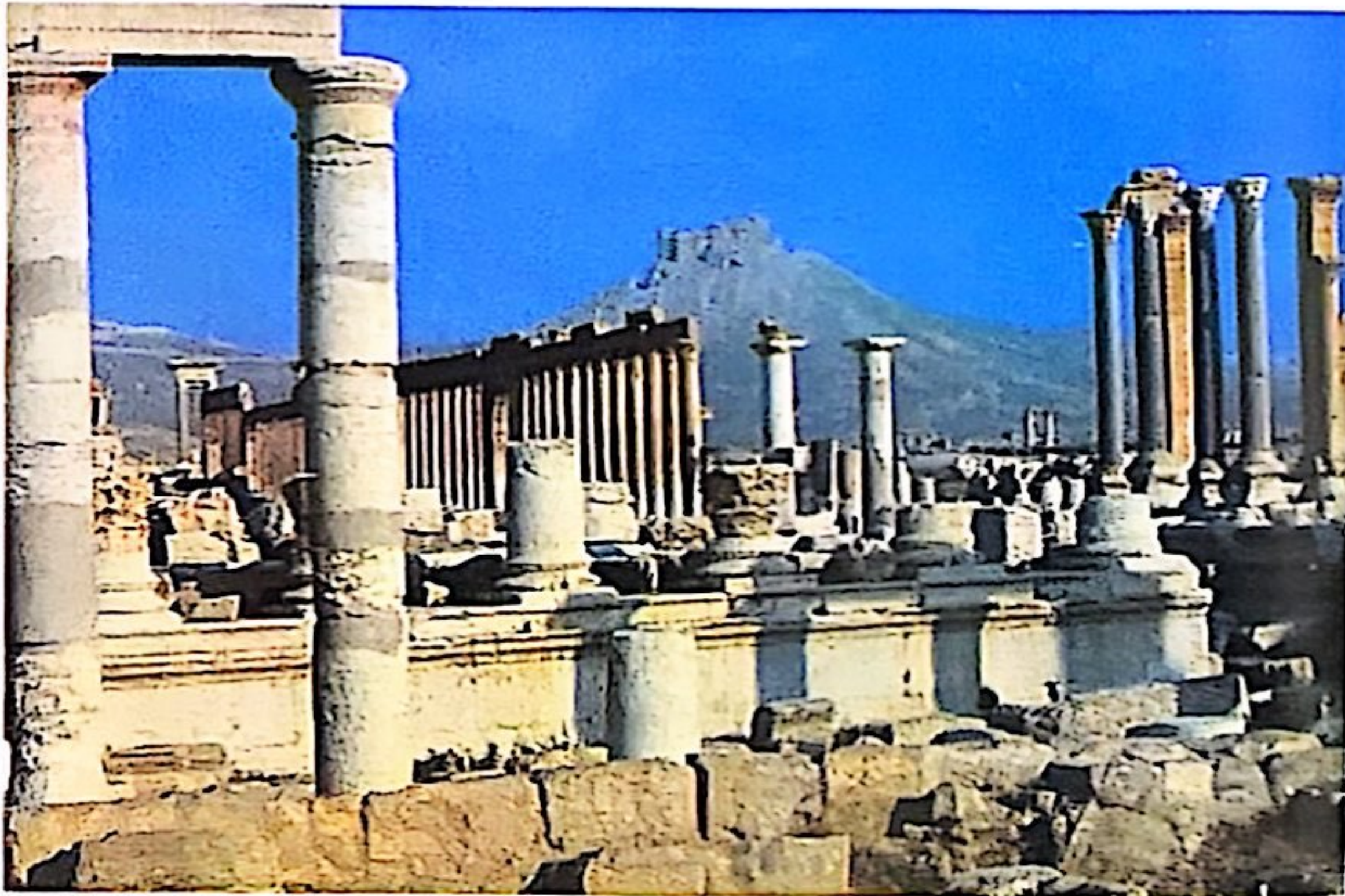
The Qattina lake is 15km from Homos, it is rich in fish, and has the first rainwater dam used in agriculture which dates back to the 2nd millennium B.C. Close to this lake is the archaeological hill called

Tel al-Nabi Mand (Qadesh), where a historic battle took place between the Hittites and the Egyptians in the thirteenth century B.C.

Palmyra

Palmyra is in the heart of the Syrian desert, and is often described as 'the bride of the desert'. Its magnificent remains tell of a heroic history during the reign of Queen Zenobia.

The 'Oasis', as it is sometimes called, is located near a hot-water spring called Afqa. It was mentioned in one of the Assyrian tablets of the 20th century B.C. It was also mentioned in the tablets of Mari. Palmyra was an ideal halt for the caravans moving between Iraq and al-Sham (present-day Syria, Lebanon and Jordan), trading in silk from China to the Mediterranean.



Palmyra

This strategic location made Tadmor (Palmyra) prosper in a well-established kingdom from the 2nd century B.C.

However, Tadmor was located between two warring empires, Rome and Persia. Tadmor found that her interests lay more with Rome, since the Persians had ambitions to take over the mouths of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers which would endanger Palmyra's trade.

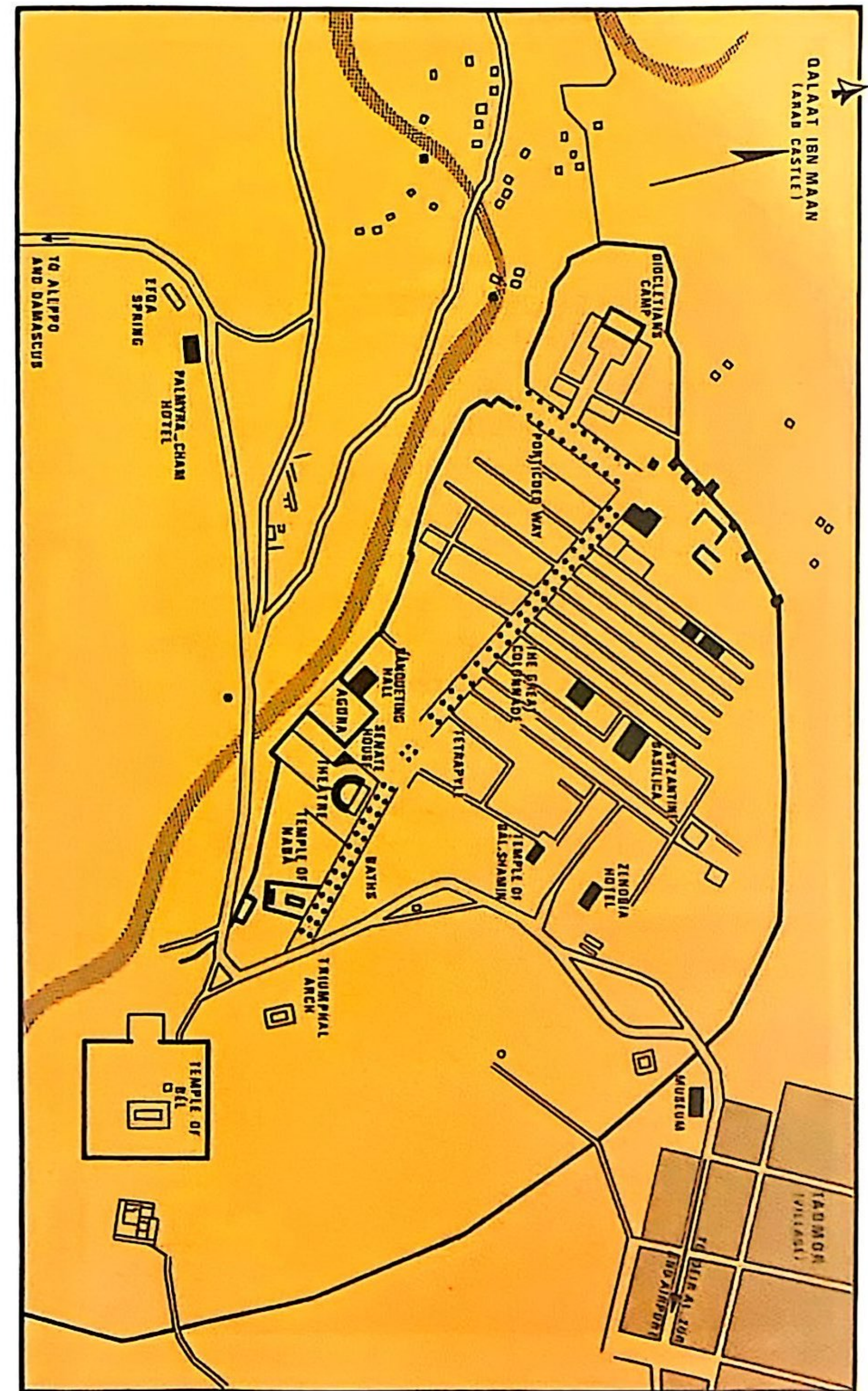
When the Romans conquered Syria, Tadmor became known as the 'city of palm-trees', and flourished even more: it imposed high taxes on goods from the caravans, and its horsemen fought alongside the Roman armies. When the Roman emperor Adrian visited Palmyra, he declared her a 'free city'; in return, the people of Tadmor gratefully called their city 'Adrianapalmyra'.

When the Severus emperors, who were originally Syrian, came to rule Palmyra, they treated her people extremely well. The Emperor Caracalla declared her a Roman colony, something the Palmyrians had always hoped for, since it exempted them from paying taxes on luxury items such as perfumes, spices, ivory, glass and silk.

This made the city a luxurious one: new constructions, streets, arches, temples and statues were built, making Palmyra one of the greatest cities of the Roman empire.

When the conflict between Persia and Rome reached its crisis, Rome resorted to the ruler of Palmyra for help. This ruler, Auzaina, managed to

withstand the Persian armies, which led the Romans to call him 'The leader of the East'. But he was soon assassinated in mysterious circumstances, and his second wife, Zenobia, a woman renowned for her exceptionally strong character, took power. She ruled Palmyra in a way that astonished both West and East. She was exceptionally intelligent and attractive. She was a gifted linguist, an eloquent speaker of Palmyrian, Greek and Egyptian. Zenobia had a wide knowledge of politics; and in her court, she had many philosophers, scholars and theologians.



Rome, fettered in chains of gold.

The destiny of the great kingdom of Palmyra was no better than that of its queen; the city fell prey to looting and destruction.

Archaeologists are still working on excavations there in order to uncover the queen's palace which was destroyed by the Romans and replaced by a military camp.

Queen Zenobia's ambitious dream is still embodied in the magnificent remains of what she built.

Palmyra lies 210km northeast of Damascus and 155km east of Homs. A tour among the ruins, which cover an area of 6 square kilometers, requires a full day in order to form an adequate idea of the beauty of the architecture which has remained. Worth visiting are the Baal temple, the Arch of Triumph, the amphitheatre, the baths, the 'Straight Street', the Congress Council and the Cemeteries. Close to Palmyra, on a nearby hill, stands the citadel of Fakhr al-Din al-Ma'ni (17th century).



Palmyran Arabesque



A Face from Palmyra

The museum of Palmyra (The Tadmor museum) is rich in art of different periods; sculpture, mosaic, gold, bronze and pottery. It also exhibits the folklore of Palmyra and the Syrian desert.

The spring of Afqa in Palmyra is the source of life of the famous oasis. Its sulphurous mineral water is said to aid in the treatment of skin diseases, chest and liver complaints and anemia. It also stimulates digestion and blood circulation.

Hama

The city is 200km to the north of Damascus and 60km to the east of Banyas. It is a very ancient city, which has flourished continually since ancient times, and has known the successive civilizations of the Fertile Crescent.



Norias on the Orontes

Hama has a long heroic history in defending Syria against foreign invasions. One of the outstanding

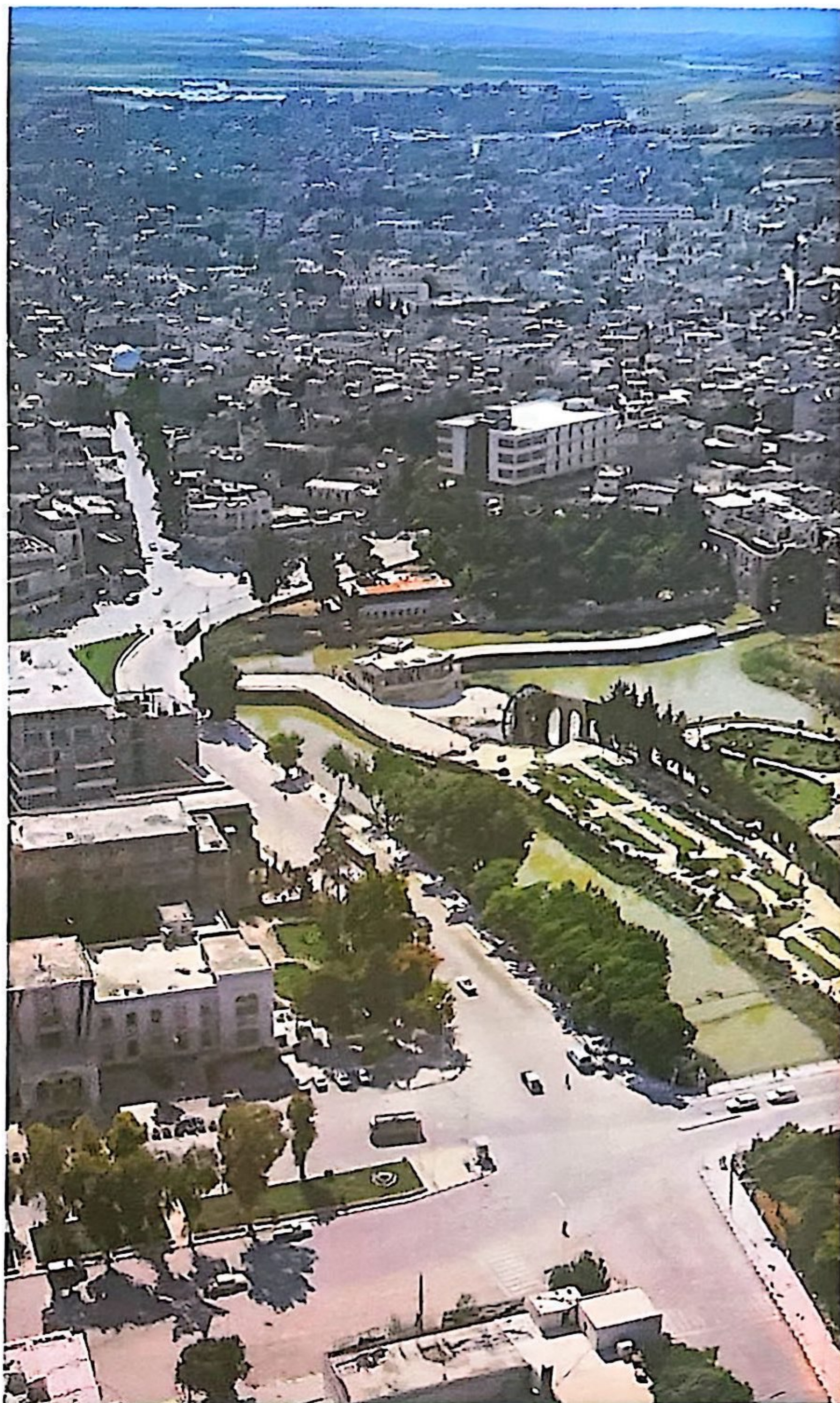
battles was that of Qarqar, where the Assyrian army was defeated in 853 B.C. Unfortunately, few of its ancient relics have been preserved. However, Hama is well known for its enormous waterwheels ('noriahs') on the Orontes, which are as old as Hama itself.

One of Hama's ancient buildings is al-Jami' al-Kabir (the Great Mosque), which dates back to the



Hand-Weaving

14th century and includes two tombs of two emirs who ruled Hama in the 13th century. Another mosque is that of Abu al-Fida, named after Hama's Sultan, who was a famous Arab geographer and historian. The city is often linked with his name. A third ancient mosque is the al-Nuri mosque, which was built in the days of Nouredin al-Zanki in 1129; on its wall appear inscriptions in both Arabic and Greek. Hama is particularly famous for its traditional industries, especially textiles and cotton cloth.



Hama

Apamea and the citadels of Mudiq and Shaizar

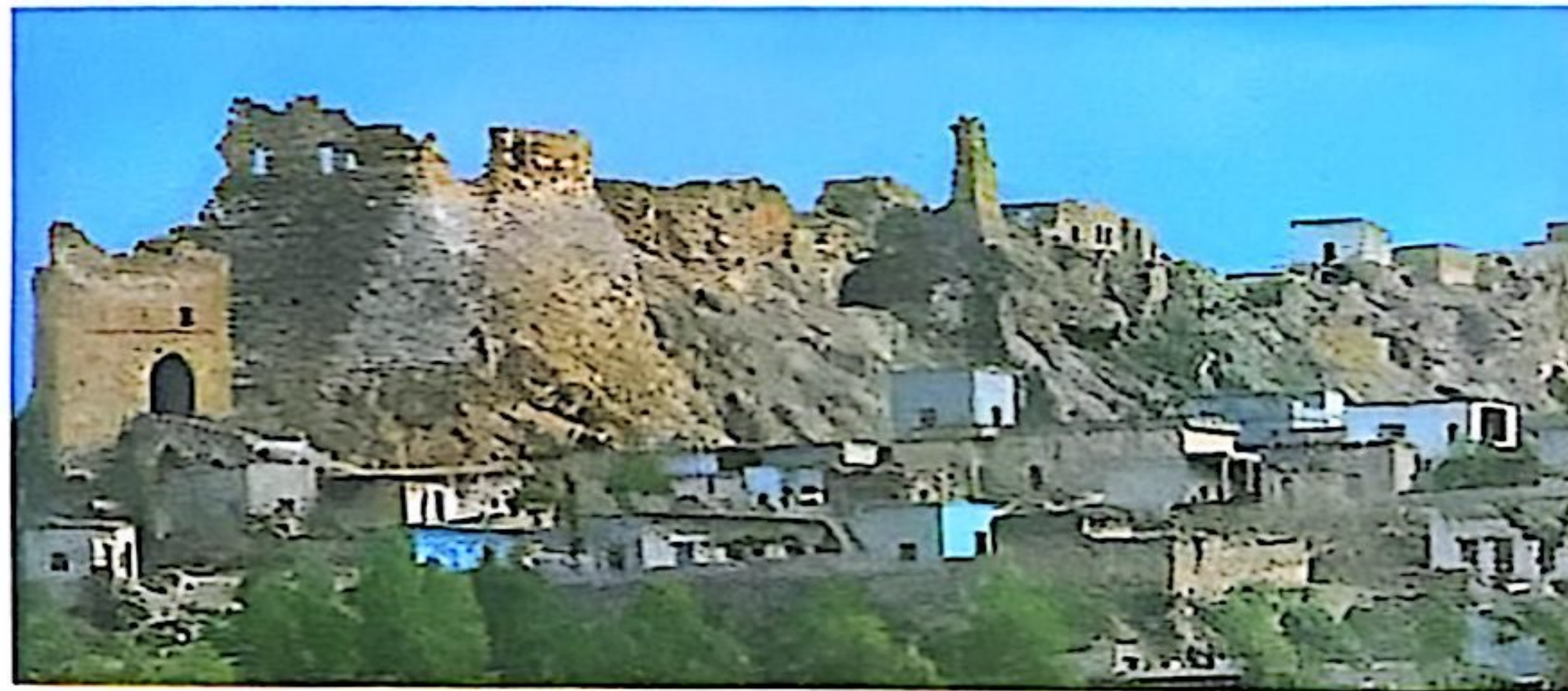
Apamea is located on the right bank of the Orontes, about 55km to the northwest of Hama. It overlooks the Ghaab plain. It was built by Salugos Nikator, the first king of the Seleucids in Syria in 300 B.C. He named it after his wife, Afamia. The city flourished to an extent that its population numbered half a million. As an Eastern crossroads, it received many distinguished visitors: Cleopatra, Septimus Severus and the Emperor Caracalla. In the Christian era, Apamea became a centre of philosophy and thought, especially of Monophysitism.

Most of the uncovered ruins in it date back to the Roman and Byzantine ages. It is distinguished for its high walls and the main thoroughfare surrounded by columns with twisted fluting. The street is about 2km long and 87 m wide. The ruins of the Roman theatre, which have been frequently disturbed, are now a



Apamea

great mass of stone. Its colonnade is 145 m long. Erected in the 2nd century, it was destroyed in the 12th century by two violent earthquakes; some columns are still standing nevertheless. To the west of the city, stands the Mudiq citadel which once formed a defence line along the Orontes. Fierce battles with the Crusaders attempting to conquer it took place in the 12th century, and Nur al-Din finally surrendered it in 1149. The citadel has huge towers, overlooking the Ghaab plain. It also has a khan built by the Turks in the 16th century, and transformed into an archaeological museum which houses Apamea's mosaics.



Qal'at Shaizar

To the south of Mudiq castle lies the citadel of Shaizar overlooking the Orontes. In the Middle Ages it could only be reached by a draw-bridge. The main tower of the citadel is square in shape and overlooks the defensive fortresses. Arabic inscriptions from the Mamluk periods appear over its entrance. The citadel was rebuilt by the Mamluks after it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1157. The Crusaders tried to occupy it several times, but in vain.

The Syrian Coast

The Syrian coast consists of long stretches of beach and green mountains. These mountains are mostly covered with pine and oak trees, and their slopes touch shore. This landscape repeats itself from Ras al-Basit in the north to Tartus in the south. On the mountains are scattered villages and towns with springs of clear mineral water.

The Beaches

The Syrian seashore is about 175 km long, and its numerous beaches are distinguished by soft sand, unpolluted sea, moderate climate and clear blue sky.



Al-Shati al-Azraq

Ras al-Bassit

Located on the northern part of the Syrian shore, about 40 km to the north of Latakia, it is one of the most beautiful spots on the Mediterranean: a wide bay, with clear water and clean sand, surrounded by mountains and green hills. Chalets, camping sites and restaurants along the shore make Ras al-Bassit all the more attractive to visitors.



Ras al-Bassit

Latakia

Latakia is Syria's main sea-port on the Mediterranean (186 km southwest of Aleppo). It has retained its importance since ancient times. Latakia was one of the five cities built by Saluqos Nikator in the 2nd century B.C. He named it after his mother, Laudetia.

Not many ancient remains have survived in Latakia, but there are four columns and a Roman arch from the time of Septimus Severus (circa 200 A.D.), in addition to a beautiful Ottoman construction called 'Khan al-Dukhan', which is now a museum.

Latakia is the sea-gate to Syria. It is well-provided with accommodation, and is well-placed as a base from which to explore the coastal regions of the country.



Latakia

There are beaches, mountains, archaeological sites and many relics of the Crusaders, all within a few hours from each other.

Mention should also be made of the historically important Ras Shamra, only 16km to the north of Latakia. This is the site of Ugarit, the kingdom that had a golden past in administration, education, diplomacy, law, religion and economics between the 16th and 13th centuries B.C. It is the kingdom that gave humanity the first alphabet in the world. This alphabet is still preserved on a clay tablet at the National Museum in Damascus.

Documents, statues and jewels from the Ugarit kingdom are also on display at the Latakia, Aleppo and Tartus museums.



Museum of Latakia

Jableh is another Syrian seaside town, 28 km to the south of Latakia.

It has a theatre built to accommodate 7,000 to 8,000 spectators. Close to Jableh is Tel Sokas, where archaeological relics were recently found, now on exhibition at the Damascus and Tartus museums.

Banyas

This city is located on the Syrian coast, 55 km to the south of Latakia. It was an ancient Phoenician seaport. The Greeks called it Balemia. It was famous for its orchards and its export of wood. Today it is better known for its oil refinery. It still contains citrus fruit orchards surrounded by green hills. On one of the hills is the imposing al-Marqab Citadel, a huge fortress of black basalt stone.

Tartus

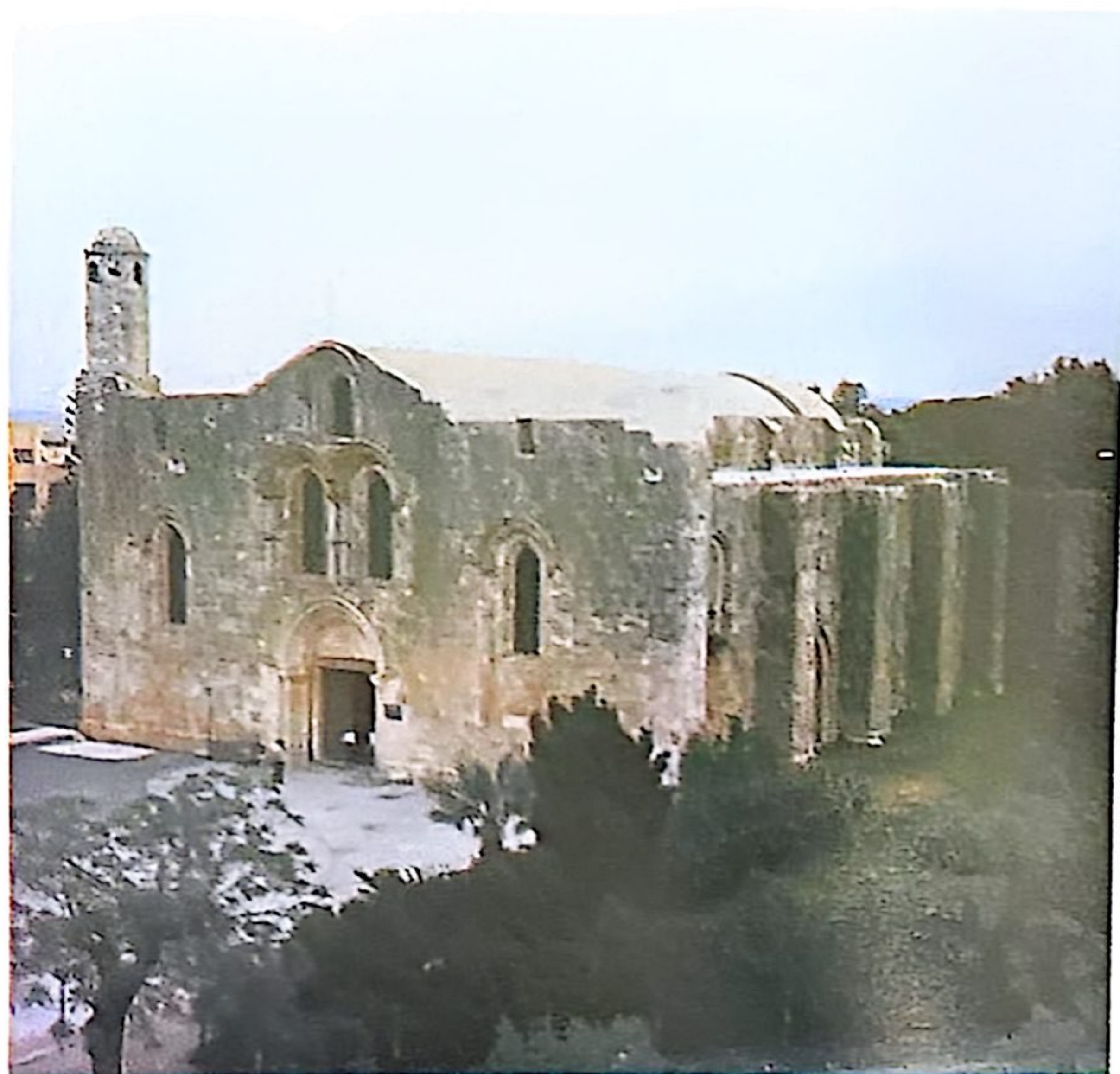
The second most important Syrian seaport on the Mediterranean (90 km to the south of Latakia). It was



Amrit Ruins

called Antaradus by the Phoenicians and Tortusa by the Byzantines. Tortusa was to become one of the main supply ports for the Crusaders and a military base of considerable importance. It was held by the Templars, but recovered by Saladin in 1188.

The arches, wall-towers and narrow lanes in Tartus evoke what the town must have been like in medieval times. A jewel of Romanesque art is the cathedral of Tartus, which is now a museum containing relics from various Syrian civilizations.



Museum of Tartus

Arwad

This is the only island in Syria, and it is located 3km from Tartus.

It was an independent kingdom named Aradus in the days of the Canaanites. It was often mentioned in inscriptions because of its importance in commerce and seafaring.

Arwad provided shelter for those escaping from foreign invasions in ancient times, especially for the people of Amrit in the south of Tartus. Amrit still



Arwad



Fishermen from Arwad

retains its name since the 5th century B.C. It has a temple surrounded by water.

Arwad is a beautiful small island, with a mass of houses and fortresses with narrow lanes. It has many cafes and restaurants overlooking Tartus and the sea. Its ancient citadel was used as a prison for the nationalists during the resistance against the French. The walls of some cells in this citadel are still covered with the writings of the nationalists.

Summer resorts and historical spots

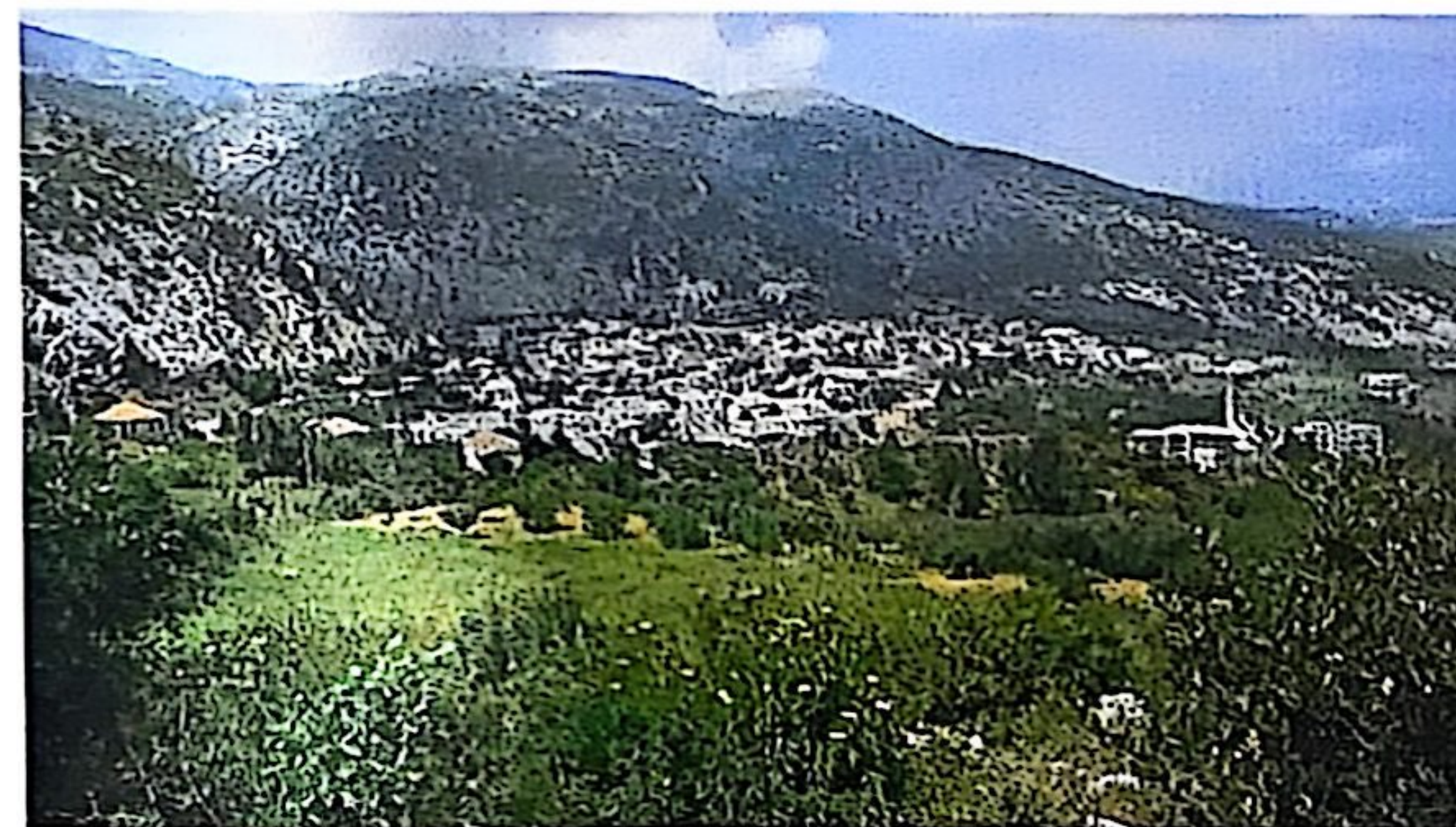
The coastal summer resorts in Syria are numerous. Scattered on the hills and mountains near the sea, they boast fresh air, cool weather in summer and moderate weather in winter. Some of these summer resorts are:

Slenfeh

50km east of Latakia and 1200m above sea-level. It has spectacular scenery and lovely weather.

Kasab

65 km north of Latakia, located on the Aqra' mountain amongst woods and thickets, 800 m above sea-level. The road leading to it from Latakia is one of the most beautiful in Syria. It runs through woods and meadows of wild flowers and groves of olive and pine, orchards of apple trees leading to the beautiful forest of Frulloq.



Kasab

Salma

Situated 12 km from Slenfeh and 800 m above sea-level. It is characterized by moderate climate and pure mineral water.

Draykish

A lovely town, 29 km from Tartus, situated on a mountain covered with olive trees which overlook the sea. It has a reputation for its well-known mineral water. It has several hotels and camping sites.

Misyaf

Located 50 km east of Banyas, 400 m above sea-level. Most important in it is the Arab citadel (Qal'at Misyaf) which was captured by the Crusaders in 1103, but recovered by the Arabs in 1140. This citadel is surrounded by orchards of fig, almond and pomegranate trees.



Misyaf

Wadi al-Oyyun

A beautiful summer resort with a multitude of small springs and several hotels and camping sites.

Safita

10 km south of Draykish, 35 km east of Tartus and 380m above sea-level, Safita is surrounded by hills covered with olive trees and flowers on all sides.

The present-day town with its tiled roofs stands on the site of the fortress that was called 'Castle le Blanc' by the Crusaders. One of its huge towers, about 38m high is still standing; this tower contains a chapel, which has never been deconsecrated: Christians still hold their services in it.

Places of archaeological interest in the district of Safita are:

Hosn Sleiman

25 km from Safita; 14 km beyond Draykish, in the direction of Misyaf. 'Hosn Sleiman' is the Arabic name for the site of ancient Baetocece; it was here, in the heart of these wild mountains cut through by ravines, that the inhabitants of Aradus (the present Isle of Arwad) once built a temple dedicated to Baal and Astarte.

Arima

Today Qalaat al-Arayma (15 km southwest of Safita), once a forward strong-point for Castle le Blanc and for the Crac, it still has two towers dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries.

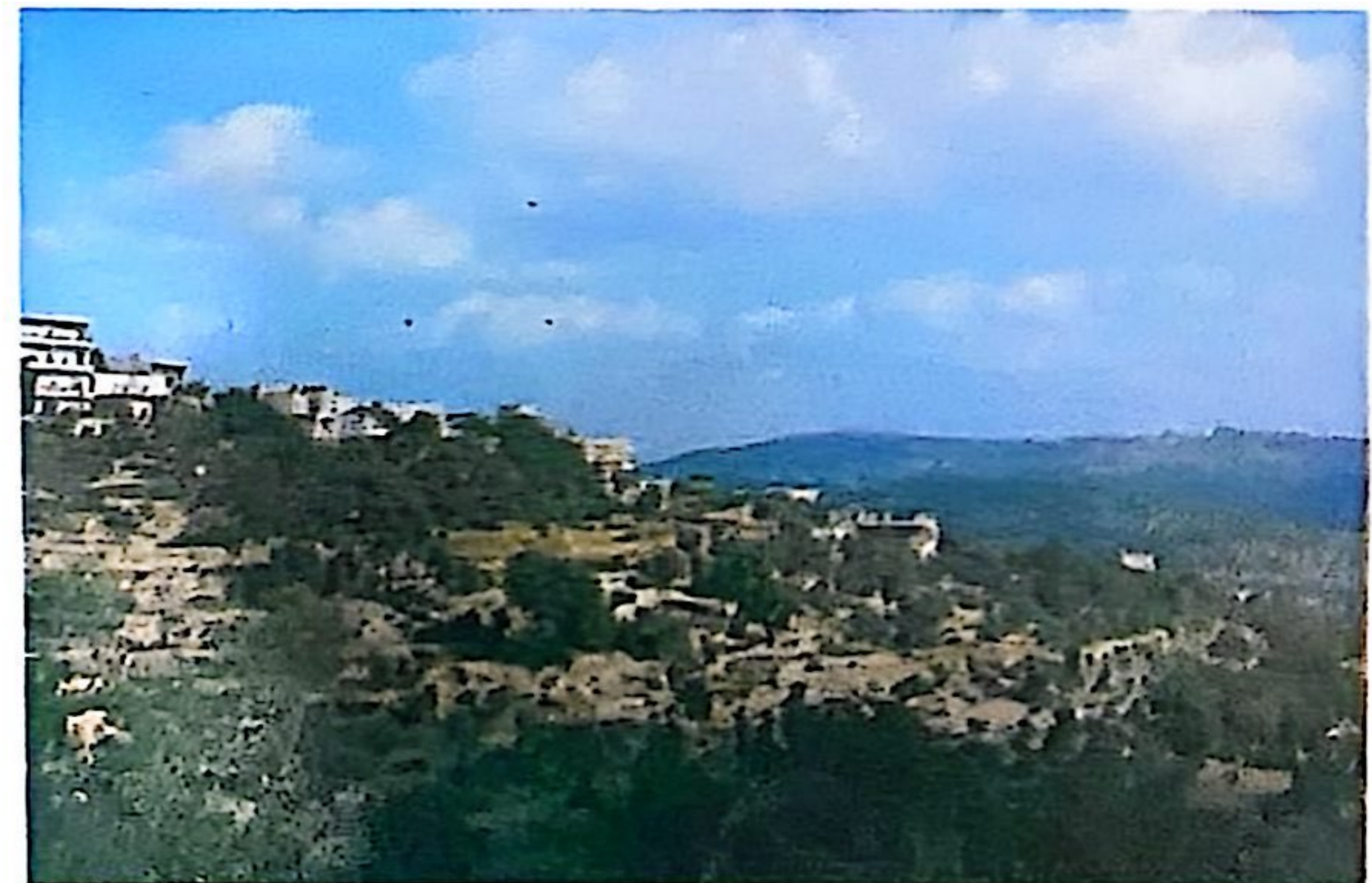


Safita

Qal'at Yahmur

(Chastel Ronger or Castrum Rubrum), 20km west of Safita on the Tartus road. Like Arima, Qal'at Yahmur was a small fortress, and its 15m high keep is still impressive.

Mention should also be made of the summer resorts north-east of Safita. Mashta al-Helu is the largest in a group of small villages scattered on the green hills, where the weather is cool even on the hottest summer days. The most attractive among these white stone villages is al-Kafroon (3km from Mashta al-Helu). It is located at the foot of a small hill, completely covered with oak trees and surrounded by mountains with many churches and mosques. Also worth visiting is Mar Elia, a cave-like church in the north of the village. There are several hotels, restaurants and cafes in the apple orchards along the streams that run through it.





Summer on the Coast



Qal'at al-Hosn (Crac des Chevaliers)

The most famous medieval citadel in the world, Qal'at al-Hosn is 65km west of Homs and 75 south-east of Tartus. It is 650m above sea-level. It was built in order to control the so-called 'Homs Gap', the gateway to Syria. It was through this passage that Syria communicated with the Mediterranean.

In ancient times the importance of this strategic corridor was immense. It was of crucial importance to the Crusaders and other foreign invaders in their conquest of the coast. Conflict over the Crac des Chevaliers continued through the ages. It was a fierce and bloody dispute, but in the end, Sultan Beybars managed to recover it in 1271 through a military trick and one month of fighting.

Crac des Chevaliers was built on the site of a former castle erected by the emirs of Homs to accommodate Kurdish garrisons; 'Crac' is a modification of the Arab word 'Qal'a'. The citadel covers an area of 3000 square meters and has 13 huge towers, in addition to many stores, tanks, corridors, bridges and stables. It can accommodate 5000 soldiers with their horses, their equipment and provisions for five years.

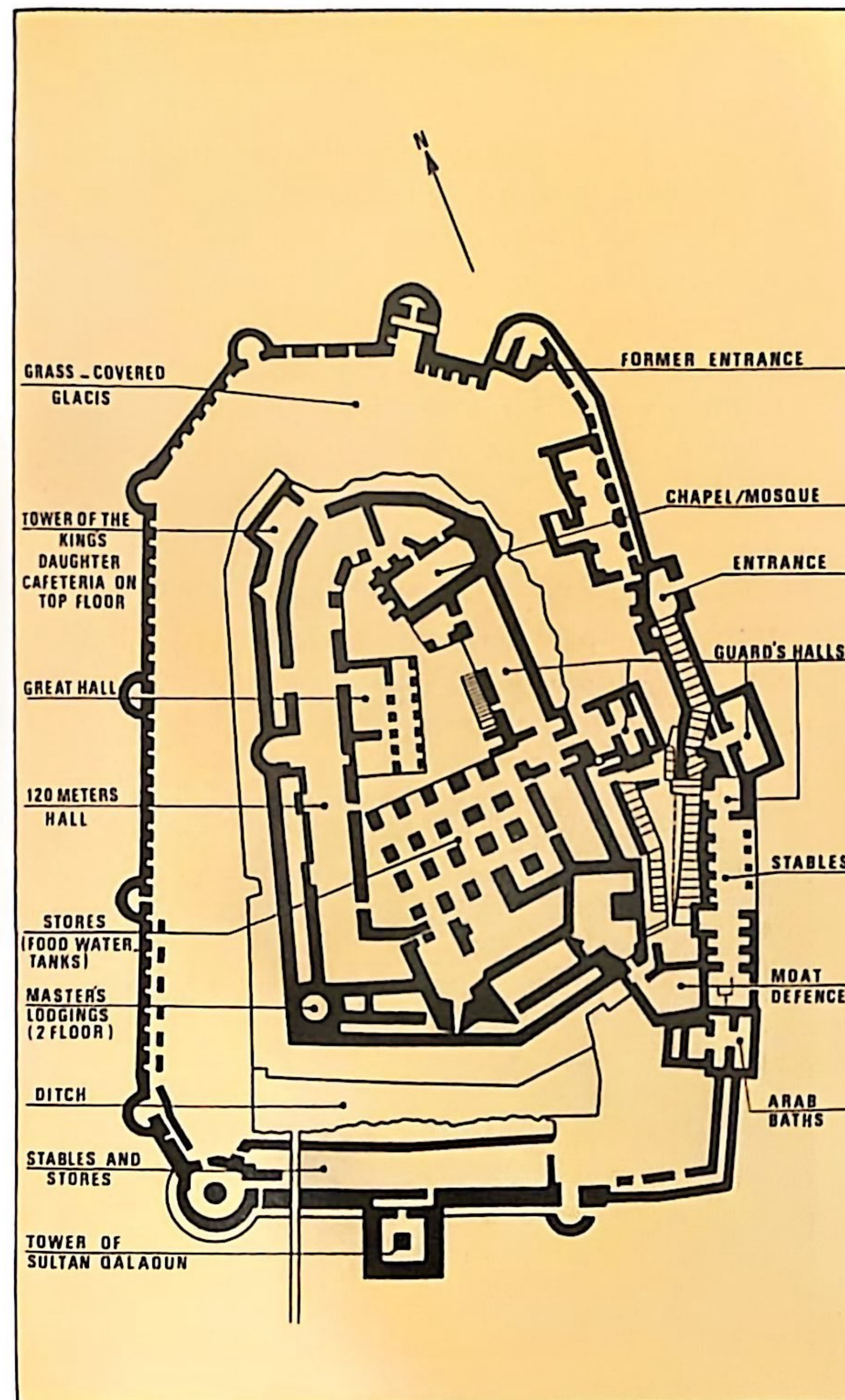
Qal'at Salah al-Din

Formerly 'Saone' (and still known as Castle Sahyoun), it was recently named after the great hero of Islam, Salah al-Din, to commemorate the capture of the fortress in 1188.

Though the importance of the position had been exploited before the Crusades, this castle was



Qal'at al-Hosen



Plan of Qal'at al-Hosen

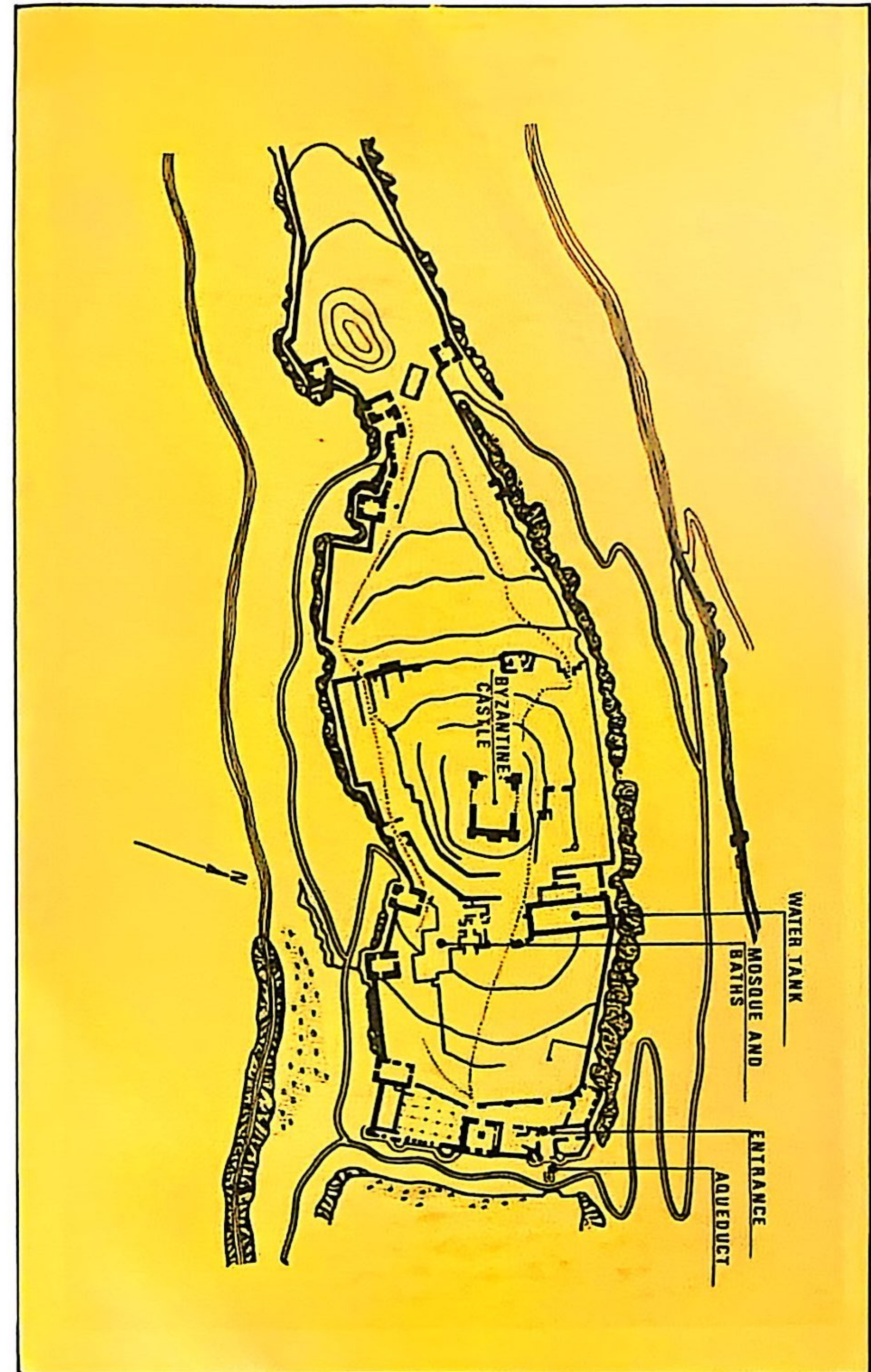
described as the most impregnable Crusader fortress. It stands on a rocky spur whose vertical walls rise above the junction of two fast-flowing streams. As late as 1965 it was impossible to reach it except on foot or on horseback by a difficult climb, first downhill and then up again after fording a stream. The fortress was completely isolated from the plateau by a deep ditch dug right through the connecting neck of land. The ditch was 156m long, 18m wide and 28m deep. Its vertical walls show a smooth, fine yellowish rock surface.

Today there is a drawbridge and a road which provide easy access to the foot of this 'eagle's nest'.

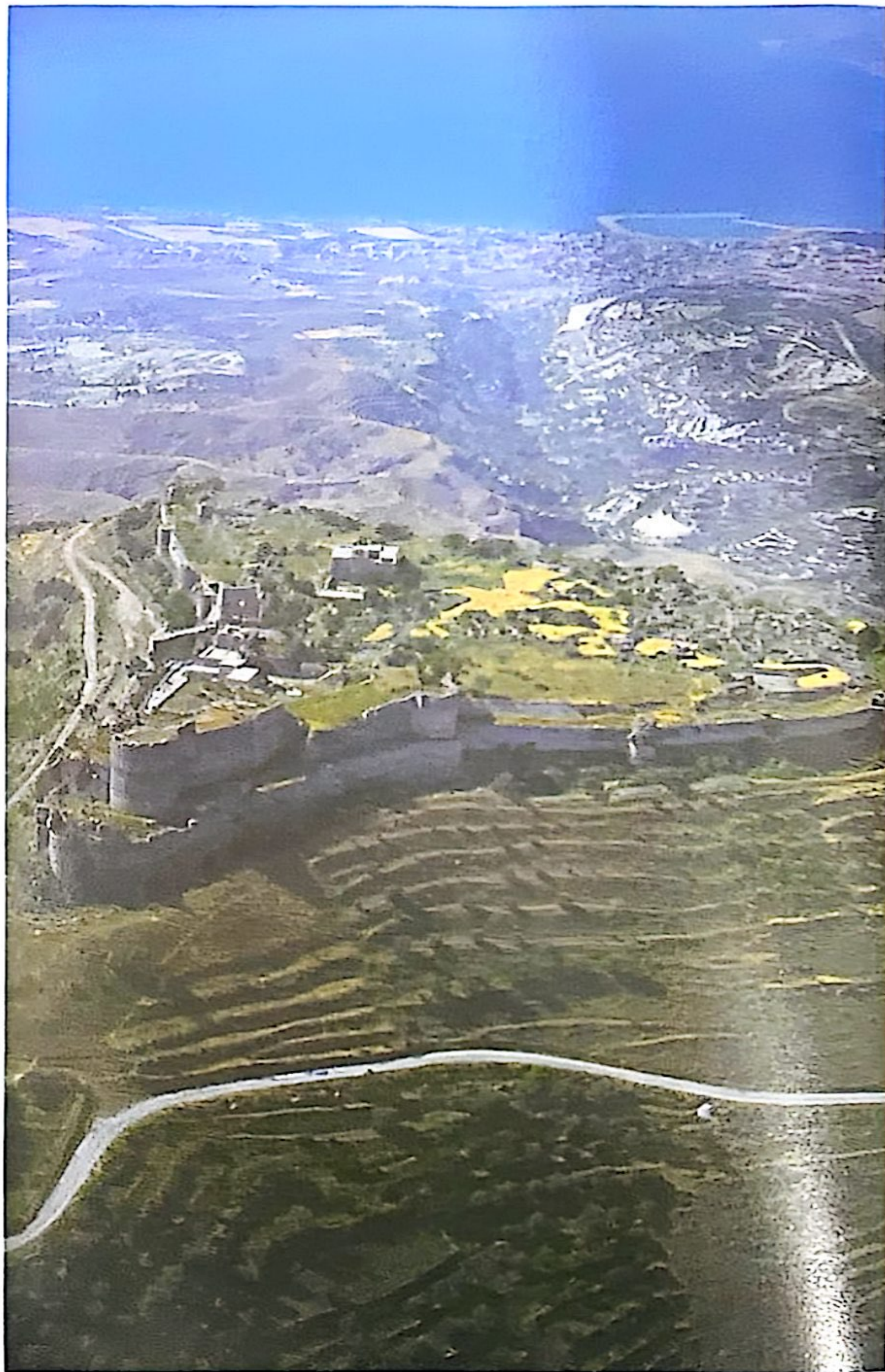
Visitors can park their cars at the bottom of this ditch, opposite the horses's mangers and hitching holes carved out of the rock.



Qal'at Salah al-Din



Plan of Qal'at Salah al-Din

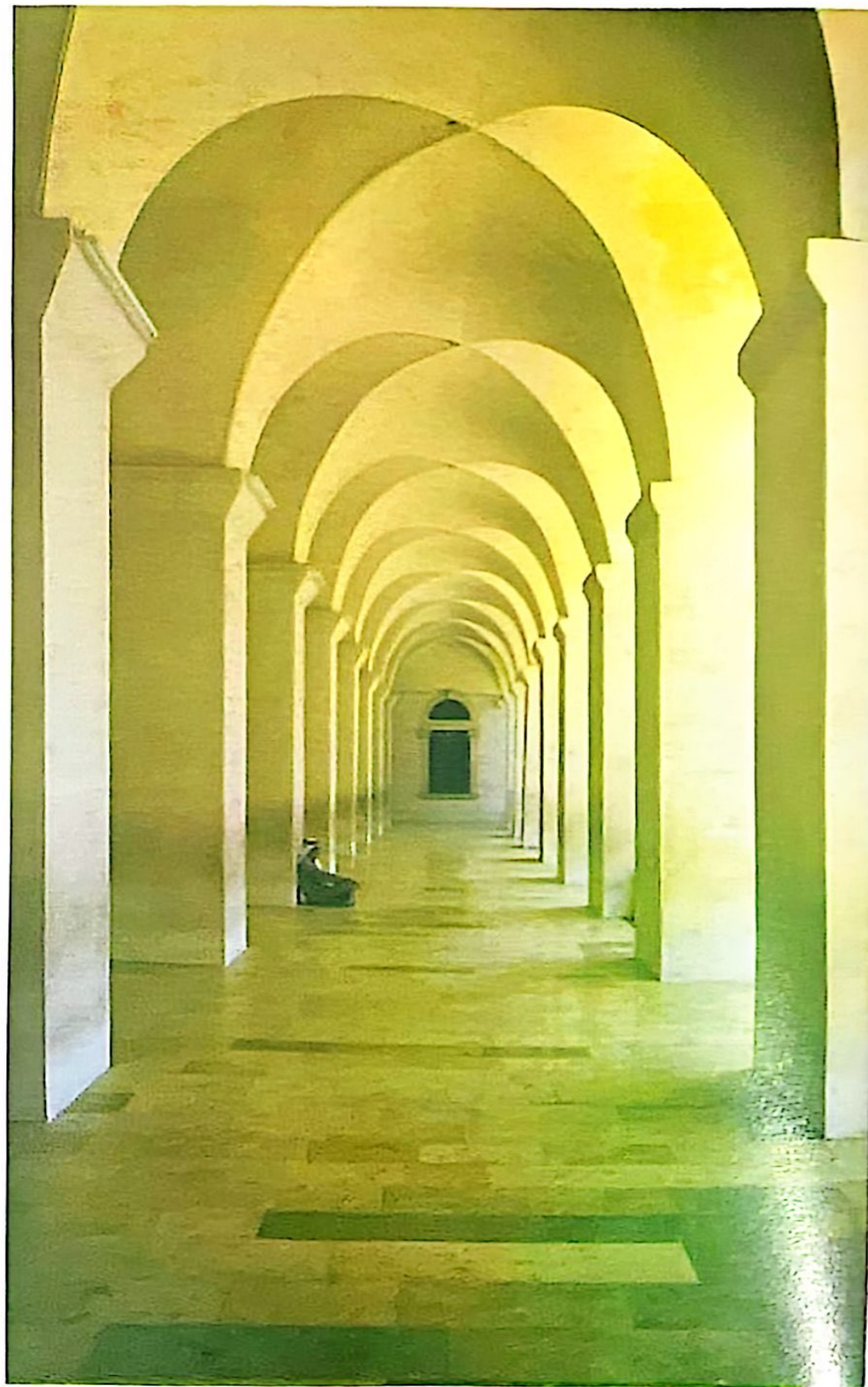


Qal'at al- Marqab

Qal'at al-Marqab (al-Marqab Citadel)

This citadel is only 6km south-east of Banyas, and is 500m above sea-level. It is enormous: there are not less than fourteen square and round towers jutting from the curtain wall that encircles the hilltop to form a triangular bastion. Its southern corner, sharper than the others and bristling with defences, has a keep rising above it like the prow of a ship. What makes it particularly glowering is the black basalt stone with which it was built. There are beautiful gardens and orchards surrounding it and the sea is not far away. This citadel could accommodate 1000 people, in addition to the garrison, along with provisions to last them for five years.

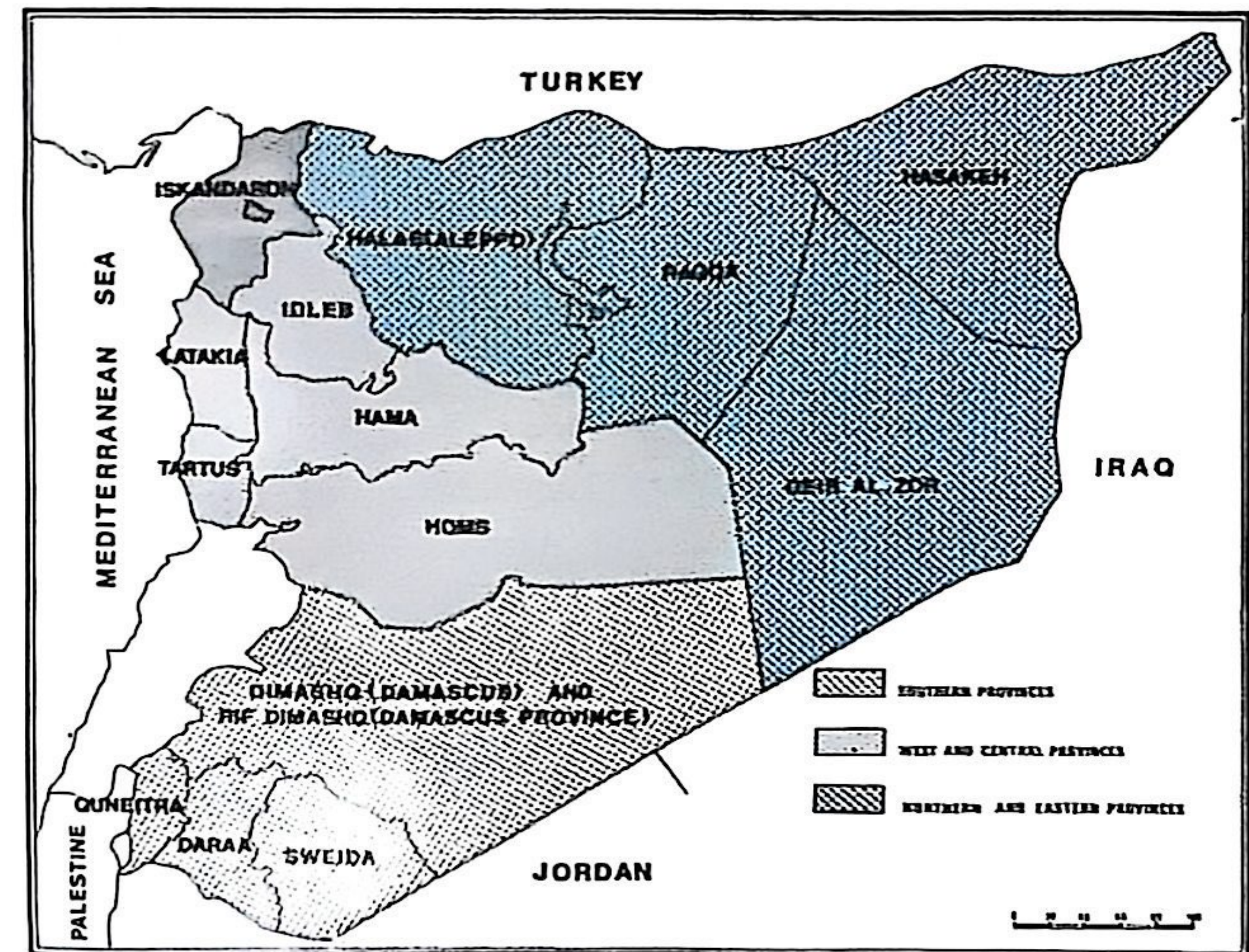
It was not until 1285 that the troops of Sultan Qalaun defeated the last of the European Knights at Margat (Marqab). The Hospitalier Knights were granted 'the honours of war' and allowed to withdraw under safe conduct to Tartus and Tripoli. There is an Arabic inscription commemorating this great victory, carved on a band of white limestone at the top of the 'tour de L'Eperon' under the keep.



The Great Omayyad Mosque, Aleppo

NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES

ALEPPO
RAQQA
DEIR AL-ZOR
HASAKEH



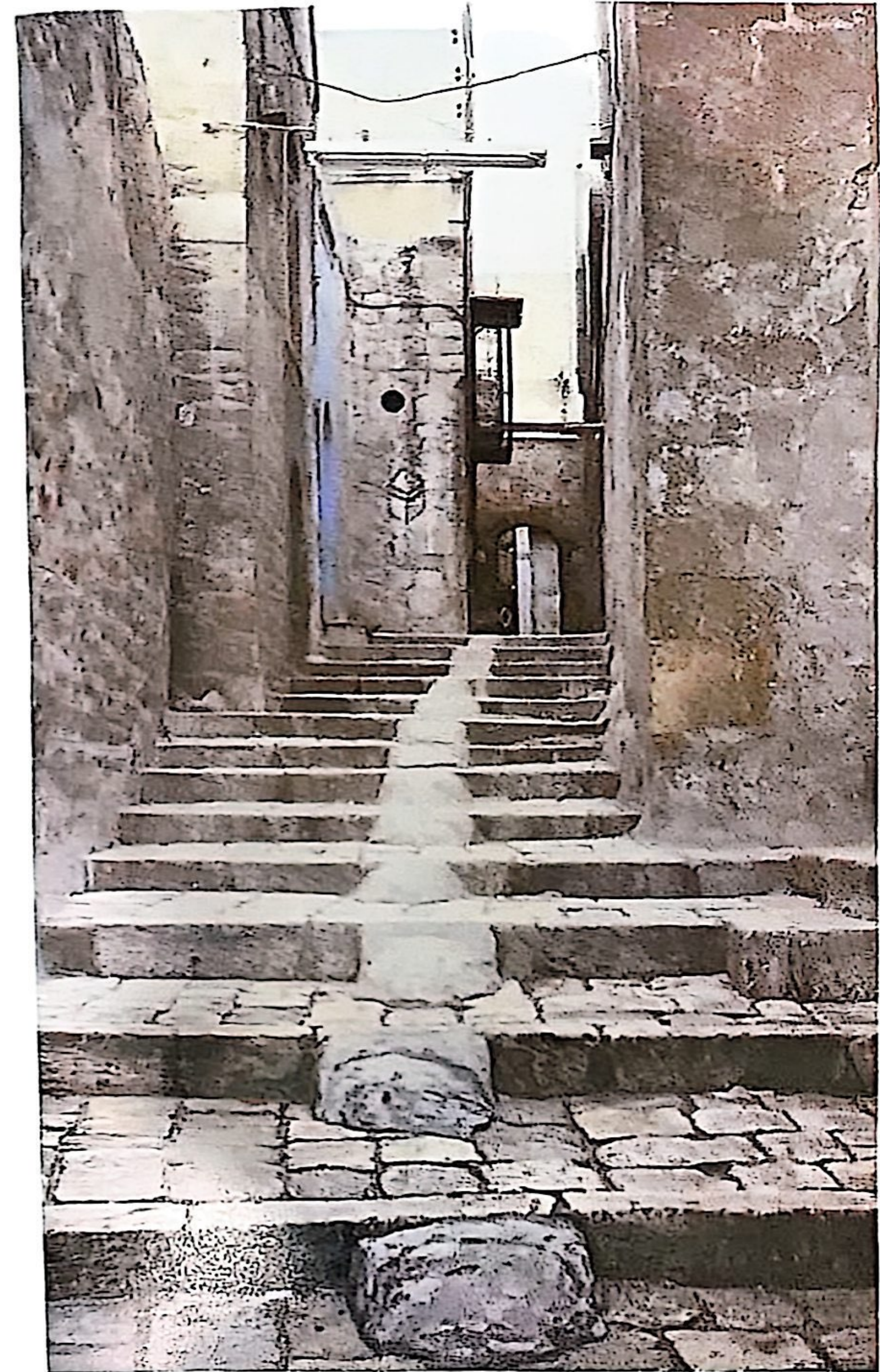
Aleppo

This is the second capital of Syria (350km north of Damascus), and one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in history. Abraham is said to have camped on the acropolis which, long before his time, served as the foundation of a fortress (where the Aleppo citadel is standing now). He milked his grey cow there, hence Aleppo's name: 'Halab al-Shahba'.

Ever since the 3rd millennium B.C., Aleppo has been a flourishing city, with a unique strategic position. This position gave the city a distinctive role from the days of the Akkadian and Amorite kingdoms until modern times. It was the meeting-point of several important commercial roads in the north. This enabled Aleppo to be the link in trade between Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. The Amorites made it their capital in the 18th century B.C.

This position made it subject to invasions from various races; from Hittites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. Aleppo was prominent in the Christian era; it became a Bishopric and a huge cathedral was built in it, which is still standing.

The conflict between Byzantium and Persia, however, resulted in the latter's occupation of Aleppo in 440. The Persians robbed the city, burned considerable parts of it and damaged many of its features. Though expelled by Justinian, the Persians still threatened Aleppo and frightened its inhabitants until the Arab Islamic conquest came in 636. The city



An Aleppo Alley

then regained its status, both cultural and commercial. Apart from the Omayyad and Abbassid periods in which Aleppo flourished, the Hamadani state established by Sayf al-Dawla in 944 made Aleppo the northern capital of Syria. Sayf al-Dawla built Aleppo's famous citadel, and in his days the city enjoyed great prosperity and fame in science, literature and medicine, despite this leader's military ambitions. Mention should be made of the two most prominent poets, al-Mutanabbi and Abu al-Firas; of the philosopher and scientist, al-Farabi; and of the linguist, Ibn Kahlaweh, all of whom lived in Sayf al-Dawla's court and were renowned for great knowledge and scholarship

Aleppo was famous for its architecture; for its attractive churches, mosques, schools, tombs and baths. As an important centre of trade between the eastern Mediterranean kingdoms and the merchants of Venice, Aleppo became prosperous and famous in the centuries preceding the Ottoman era. Many of its 'khans' (caravanserais) are still in use even today; one of them is called 'Banadiqa Khan', 'Banadiqa' in Arabic being the term for 'inhabitants of Venice'

In the Ottoman age, Aleppo remained an important centre of trade with Turkey, France, England and Holland. This caused various types European architecture to be adopted in Aleppo which can be seen in many buildings today.

The Aleppo Citadel

50 m above the city, a ring of crenellated walls and towers rises from a steep glacis, encircling a mass of



Qal'at Halab (Aleppo Citadel)

ruins from every period. It has always been extremely important, both strategically and militarily. It was built in the days of Sayf al-Dawla al-Hamadani, on the remains of earlier civilizations.

The citadel's fortified entrance is a marvellous example of Arab military architecture. On the north and south sides, great towers rise above the moat. This moat, 20 m deep and 30 m wide, emphasizes the fortress's proud isolation.

The main parts of the citadel are: The throne room, the bathroom, the small mosque (Ibrahim's mosque), the great mosque built in 1213 whose square minaret is 21 m high and from which can be seen a splendid view. Inside the citadel there is a small museum that contains relics uncovered during restoration and reconstruction.

Worth visiting also are the high walls of ancient Aleppo, with their fortified doors (Hadid, Antakia, and Qinsrin) which are a fine example of Islamic military architecture.

Aleppo





Khan al-Wazir, Aleppo

Souqs and Commercial Khans

In terms of spaciousness and originality, the covered souqs of Aleppo, which extend for more than 10km, are the most striking in any Islamic city. The souqs are named after the various crafts: hence, we find the souq of gold, the souq of copper, cotton, etc. Traditionally, there is always a fountain in the centre and sometimes a little garden planted with jasmine and roses. Most of these souqs date back to the 15th century. They are living museums which depict medieval life.

The khans (caravanserais) are in the same area as the souqs, since they were used for the accommodation of traders and their goods. These khans are characterized by their beautiful facades and entrances, their high arches and fortified wooden doors. Some of these khans are: Jumruk (Customs), Wazir (Minister) and Saboun (Soap).

Places to visit in Aleppo

- The National Museum; this includes in particular documents and relics from Ebla and Mari.
- Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions.
- al-Jami' al-Kabir (The Great Mosque), similar to the Omayyad mosque in Damascus.
- Old schools, churches, mosques, baths and ancient houses, some dating back to the 15th century, like the al-Bunduqiah (Venetian) Consulate, which contains superb ornaments and antiquities.

Qal'at Sam'an (Saint Simon)

This citadel is 60 km north-west of Aleppo. It was



Museum of Arts and Popular Crafts, Aleppo



St. Simon's Cathedral

named after the hermit Saint Simon (Sam'an), a shepherd from northern Syria, who became a monk after a revelation in a dream. Following Saint Simon's death in 459, the Emperor Zenon ordered that a cathedral be built where the saint used to pray.

The layout was original, centering on the famous column from which Saint Simon used to preach. Four basilicas, arranged in the shape of a cross, opened into an octagon covered by a dome, in the centre of which stood the holy column.

It is a beautiful church built on the ridge of the hill where Saint Simon had taken up 'residence'. Simplicity and harmony combine to make the ruins of the Basilica of St. Simon (an earthquake destroyed parts of the church less than half a century after it had been built) a masterpiece of pre-Islamic art in Syria.



St. Simon's Citadel

In the 10th century, some towers and walls were erected. It was then called 'Qal'at Sam'an' (Simon's citadel). It became the centre of conflict between Byzantium and the Hamadani kingdom; in 986, the son of Sayf al-Dawla al-Hamadani finally captured it.



Qalb Lawzi

The church of Qalb Lawzi (Idleb)

· This is 65 km west of Aleppo. It dates back to the 6th century, and is a masterpiece of Syrian Byzantine art.

Ebla (Tel Mardikh-Idleb)

This 'Tel' is 25 km south-east of Idleb. It is the site of important and recent archaeological discoveries. Excavations in the 'Tel' have revealed a very old Syrian civilization, that of Ebla, which flourished in the 3rd and 2nd millenniums B.C.

In the palace of this great kingdom, a library



A Tablet from Ebla

containing more than 17,000 clay tablets was uncovered. These tablets are the earliest written documents in Syria.

Palaces of the Semi-Desert

Rasafeh

It is located south of the Euphrates and north of the Syrian semi-desert, 160 km south-east of Aleppo and 30km south of the Aleppo-Raqqa road.



Al-Rasafa

Rasafeh palace was the residence of Hisham ibn Abdul Malik, the third Omayyad Caliph, whose age

was a golden one, due to his great interest in the arts and in architecture. He had several palaces built in various parts of Syria. He was in favour of simplicity and modesty; this is why he chose Rasafeh as his residence. There, he died and was buried.

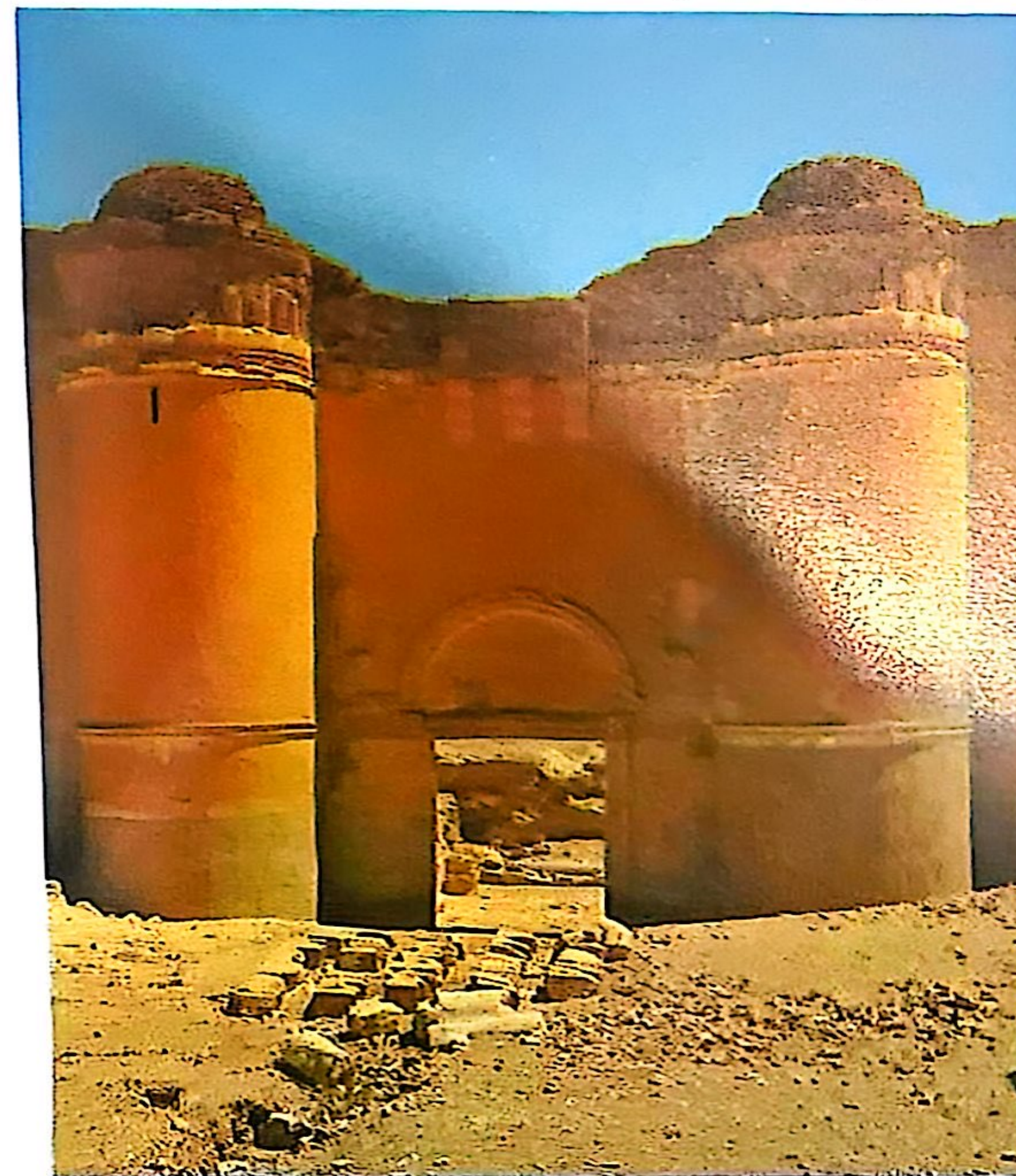
The palace was originally a church, built to commemorate a Roman officer (St. Sergius), who died in defence of Christianity in the 4th century. In 616, the church was invaded by the Persians, robbed and destroyed. When Hisham ibn Abdul Malik became a caliph in the 8th century, he built two beautiful palaces on its site. Later, the Abbassids invaded and destroyed what the Caliph Hisham had built. Very little of the ruins of the Mar Sarkis church remain. Parts of the church have been used as a mosque; inscriptions in both Arabic and Greek, engraved on the walls, indicate that Christians and Muslims co-existed peacefully in Syria from the 13th century onwards.

Qasr al-Hir al-Gharbi

45 km south-west of Tadmor (Palmyra), built by the Caliph Hisham ibn Abdul Malik in the 8th century, this palace is square and surrounded by a huge wall, at each corner of which there is a round tower. At each side of the main gate there are two half-rounded towers. It has a courtyard with columns with Corinthian crowns.

Qasr al-Hir al-Sharqi

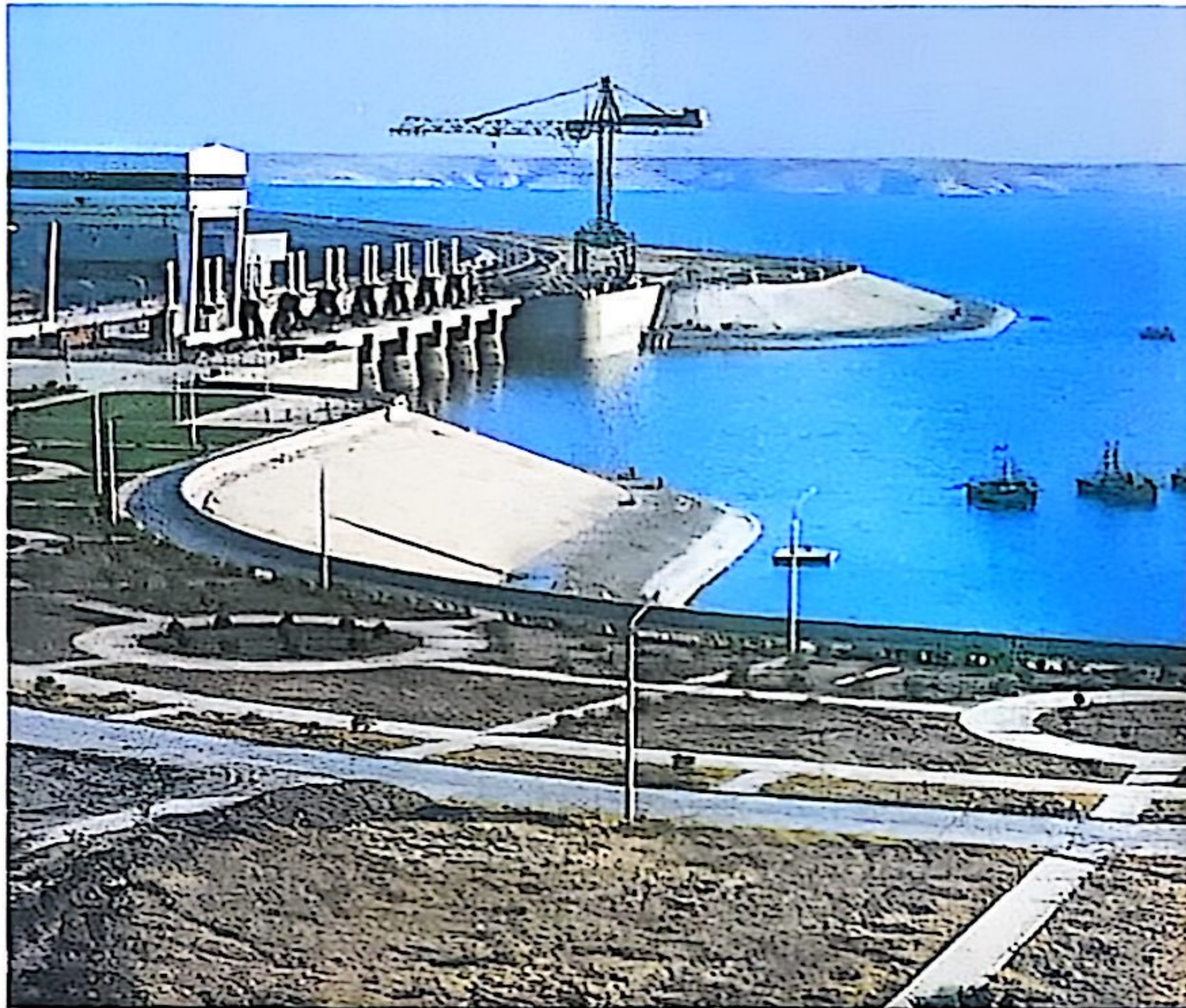
110 km north-east of Palmyra, this palace was built by the Caliph Hisham in 628. It contains a palace-residence for the caliph and for the garrisons. There is a small mosque built in the style of the Omayyad Mosque in Damascus. There is a bath with hot, warm and cold running water. This is the oldest Omayyad bath. The palace is surrounded by a wide garden.



Qasr al-Hir al-Sharqi

Raqqa

Located on the left bank of the Euphrates between Aleppo (188 km) and Deir al-Zor (105km). It is an ancient city built by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C. In 662 the Caliph Mansur built, on the ruins of Raqqa, a new city imitating the style of Baghdad



The Euphrates Dam

which he called 'Rafiq'. Invaded by the Mongols in the 12th century. Raqqa has few remains left from that period. These were built by the Caliph Harun al-Rashid in the Abbassidelage. Some remains of ancient Raqqa survive today. Those built in pink tile reflect a

particular style of architecture. Of the Jam'i al-Kabir (the Great Mosque), there remains only the minaret, which was reconstructed by Nur al-Din in 1166. Pottery and glass were famous, and there is a museum in the city which contains many relics of ancient Raqqa. A lot of these relics can also be seen in museums in New York, Washington and other Western cities.

Raqqa is beginning to flourish again, and to play an important economic role (after the building of the Euphrates Dam) in the life of Modern Syria.

Al-Thawra (Tabaqa)

This is a new city that rose up out of the sand. It was inaugurated by President Hafez al-Assad in 1973. Al-Thawra, 'the Revolution', is the capital of the area of the Euphrates dam. Here, when people talk of 'the dam', they do not only mean the huge structure which holds back the river (4500 meters long, 60 meters high, 512 meters wide at the base, 41 million cubic meters of rock earth and clay), but they also mean the al-Assad lake (80 km long, with 12 billion cubic meters of water, and a hydroelectric power-station. well as the 640.000 hectares of agricultural land now brought under cultivation).

Gone are the fears of devastating floods. Experimental farms and agricultural colleges are pointing the way to the future.

Thanks to the cooperation between Unesco and the Syrian government, monuments of the site were saved from the river flood, including Ja'bar Citadel and the



Qal'at Ja'bar

two minarets of Maskana and Abi Hurayra; relics of these sites can now be seen in the Aleppo Museum.

In the distance, on the other bank of the dam, a pink fortress appears reflected in the blue water of the lake. This is Qal'at Ja'bar, one of the Seleucid fortresses reconstructed by Nur al-Din in the 12th

century. It is surrounded by two walls with thirty-five towers of different shapes.

The facades of the towers are richly decorated with ornamentations and inscriptions. The citadel which has been restored is to be turned into a tourist centre.

Deir al-Zor

320 km south-east of Aleppo, Deir al-Zor is the most important urban centre in the east of Syria. Its river is the Euphrates, lifeline of the region and fount of civilization throughout the ages. With the formation of Lake al-Assad, it is now possible to regulate its once capricious flow and to make plans for new harvests.



Qalát al - Rahba

85 km south of Deir al-Zor, on the western bank of the Euphrates, is the archaeological site of the birthplace of Seleucus, near the Arab village of Salihyeh. This was the historic town built by



Jewellery from Mari

Seleucus Nicator, Alexander's lieutenant, the fortified town of Doura Europos. This town was closely linked with Palmyra, serving as an important forward-line of defence against the Persians.

The site did not attract significant attention until 1921 when some mural paintings were discovered in the temple (there were sixteen temples dedicated to the

various gods of Palmyra, at present in the National Museum at Damascus). Many other discoveries followed, notably frescoes dating from 235 A.D., which were in a remarkable state of preservation. They, too, were transported to the Damascus Museum in 1936. Doura Europos, however, is still a place of interest for visitors.

120 km south of this town is the site of the Kingdom of Mari (Tel Hariri), near Abu Kamal. This kingdom dates back to the 3rd millennium B.C. It was ruled by kings of the 10th dynasty after the flood. The discovery of Mari (1932), like the recent discovery of Ebla (1975), attracted the attention of archaeologists and researchers in various fields. Twenty thousand tablets with their cuneiform inscription recount the political and diplomatic life in these kingdoms. Many of the remains and relics, statues, jewels, tablets and stamps, are now at the Damascus, Aleppo, Deir al-Zor and Paris museums.

Another archaeological site is at the intersection of the Euphrates and of the Khabur near Mavadin (Tel al-Ashara), where the ancient city of Tarqa, the capital of the Khana Kingdom, flourished in the 2nd millennium B.C. after the fall of Mari. The wall that surrounded the city is one of the most enormous of the ancient world; it had a diameter of 20m.

Halabiya and Zalabiya

North-east of Deir al-Zor, there is a vast enclosing wall with three fortified gateways which enfolds within its towers a town that dates from Byzantine days. Both Halabiya and Zalabiya were forward-



Halabiya and Zalabiya

defence lines against Persian invasions. At Mayadin is the Rahbi Citadel, which was built by Assad al-Din Shirgoh, the uncle of Salah al-Din al-Ayoubi.



MUSEUMS IN SYRIA

Province	Museum	City	Position
Damascus	National Museum	Damascus	Jami'a Street
Damascus	Museum of Art & Popular Traditions	Damascus	Azem Palace
Damascus	al-Khatt al-Arabi (Arabic Calligraphy)	Damascus	Jaqmaqieh School
Damascus	Museum of Arabic Medicine & Science	Damascus	Nuri Health Centre (Bimaristan)
Damascus	Historical Museum of Damascus	Damascus	al-Bayt al-Shami
Aleppo	Aleppo Museum	Aleppo	
Aleppo	Museum of Popular Traditions	Aleppo	Bayt Ajeqbash
Aleppo	Qalaat Halab Museum	Aleppo	al-Qal'a (The Citadel)
Hama	Hama Museum	Hama	Azem Palace
Hama	Alamea Museum	Hama	Mudiq Citadel
Homs	Homs Museum	Homs	Cultural Centre
Homs	Tadmor Museum	Tadmor	Palmyra
Sweida	Sweida Museum	Sweida	Municipality Building
Sweida	Shahba Museum	Shahba	
Idleb	Idleb Museum	Idleb	
Idleb	al-Ma'arra Museum	al-Ma'arra	Khan Murad Pasha
Tartus	Tartus Museum	Tartus	The Cathedral
Tartus	Arwad Museum	Arwad	The Citadel
Tartus	Amrit Museum	Amrit	
Dar'a	Bosra Museum	Bosra	The Citadel
Latakia	Latakia Museum	Latakia	
Deir al-Zor	Deir al-Zor Museum	Deir al-Zor	Municipality Building
Raqqa	Raqqa Museum	Raqqa	
Raqqa	Ja'bar Citadel Museum	Raqqa	Ja'bar Citadel

OFFICIAL AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS IN SYRIA

Weekly Holiday	:Friday
January 1st	: New Year's Day
March 8th	: March 8th Revolution
March 21	: Mother's Day
April 17th	: Independence Day
May 1st	: Labour Day
May 6th	: Martyr's Day
December 25th	: Christmas

Moveable Feasts:

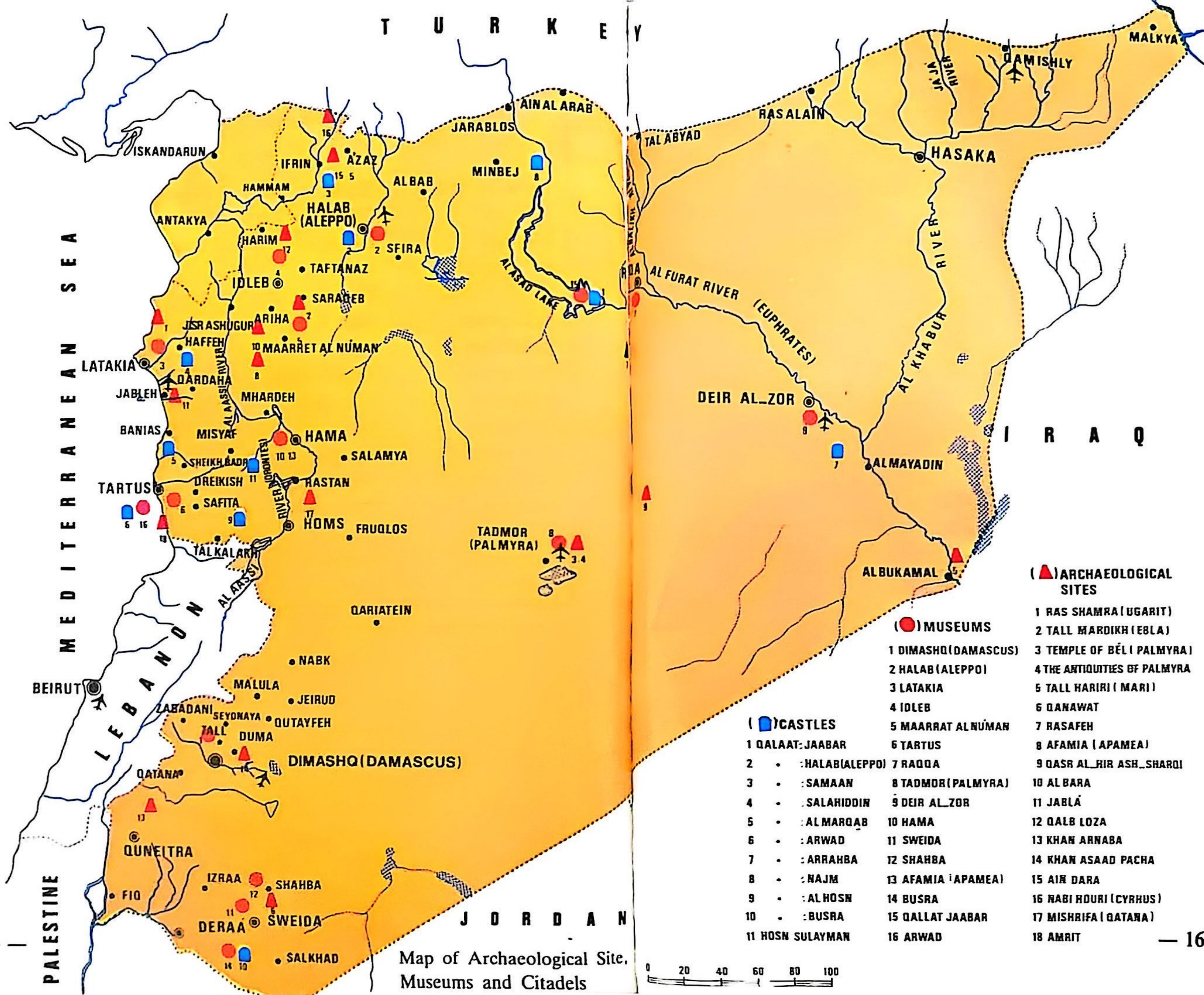
- Easter
- Id al-Fitr
- Id al-Adhha
- Hegira New Year
- Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad

FAIRS & FESTIVALS IN SYRIA

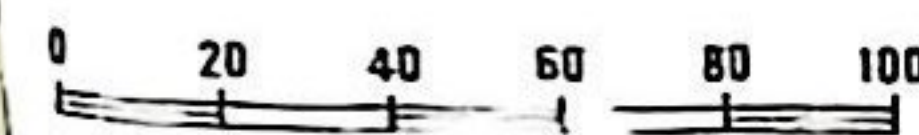
- Flower Festival (Latakia) April
- International Flower Show (Damascus) May
- Vine Festival (Sweida) July
- Cotton Festival (Aleppo) July
- Damascus International Fair (Damascus) .. September
- Bosra Festival (Bosra) October
- Film Festival (Damascus) November
- Theatre Festival (Damascus) November

LOCATION OF MINERAL WATER AND SULFUR SPRING

Kind of Water	Name of Place	Province
Mineral	Buqein	Damascus countryside
Mineral	Draykish	Tartus
Sulfurous	Afqa	
	Palmyra	Homs
Sulfurous	Abu Rabah	Homs
Sulfurous	Sikhneh	Homs
Sulfurous	Sheikh Issa	Idleb
Sulfurous	Ras al-Ein	Hasakeh
Sulfurous	Safeh	Hasakeh
Sulfurous	Sfireh	Aleppo
Sulfurous	Dmeir	Damascus countryside
Sulfurous	Yadoudeh	Dara'a
Sulfurous	Qastoun	Hama
Sulfurous	Fasrayya	Damascus countryside
Sulfurous	Qassmieh	Damascus countryside



Map of Archaeological Site, Museums and Citadels



Cyrus Bridge - North of Syria



DISTANCE BETWEEN CITIES
(In Kilometers)

	Damascus	Homs	Hama	Aleppo	Latakia	Dier-al Zor	Dara'a	Sweida
Seydnaya	29	146	193	339	330	650	130	135
Ma'lula	56	118	169	312	305	625	157	162
Nebk	81	81	128	274	267	598	182	187
Homs	162	-	47	193	186	354	263	268
Palmyra	220	153	200	346	339	201	321	326
Hama	209	47	-	146	145	470	310	315
St.Simeon	414	252	205	59	245	383	515	520
Aleppo	355	193	146	-	186	324	456	461
Dier-al Zor	421	354	401	324	510	-	522	527
Qamishli	944	782	735	589	775	260	1045	1050
Zabadani	48	210	257	402	396	727	149	154
Bludan	52	214	261	407	400	731	153	158
Dara'a	101	263	310	456	449	780	-	68
Sweida	106	286	315	491	454	785	68	0
Bosra	139	301	348	494	487	818	40	33
Crac des chevaliers	222	60	107	235	164	414	323	328
Safita	240	78	125	271	120	630	341	346
Draykish	253	91	138	284	227	445	354	359
Tartus	258	96	143	276	90	600	359	364
Latakia	348	186	147	186	-	510	449	454
Slunfeh	382	220	177	226	50	550	483	488
Kasab	407	245	206	245	59	569	508	513
Raqqa	547	385	388	192	378	138	648	653
Hasakch	642	704	657	511	697	177	743	748
Quncitra	67	229	276	422	415	488	76	98
Idleb	322	160	113	59	127	383	423	428

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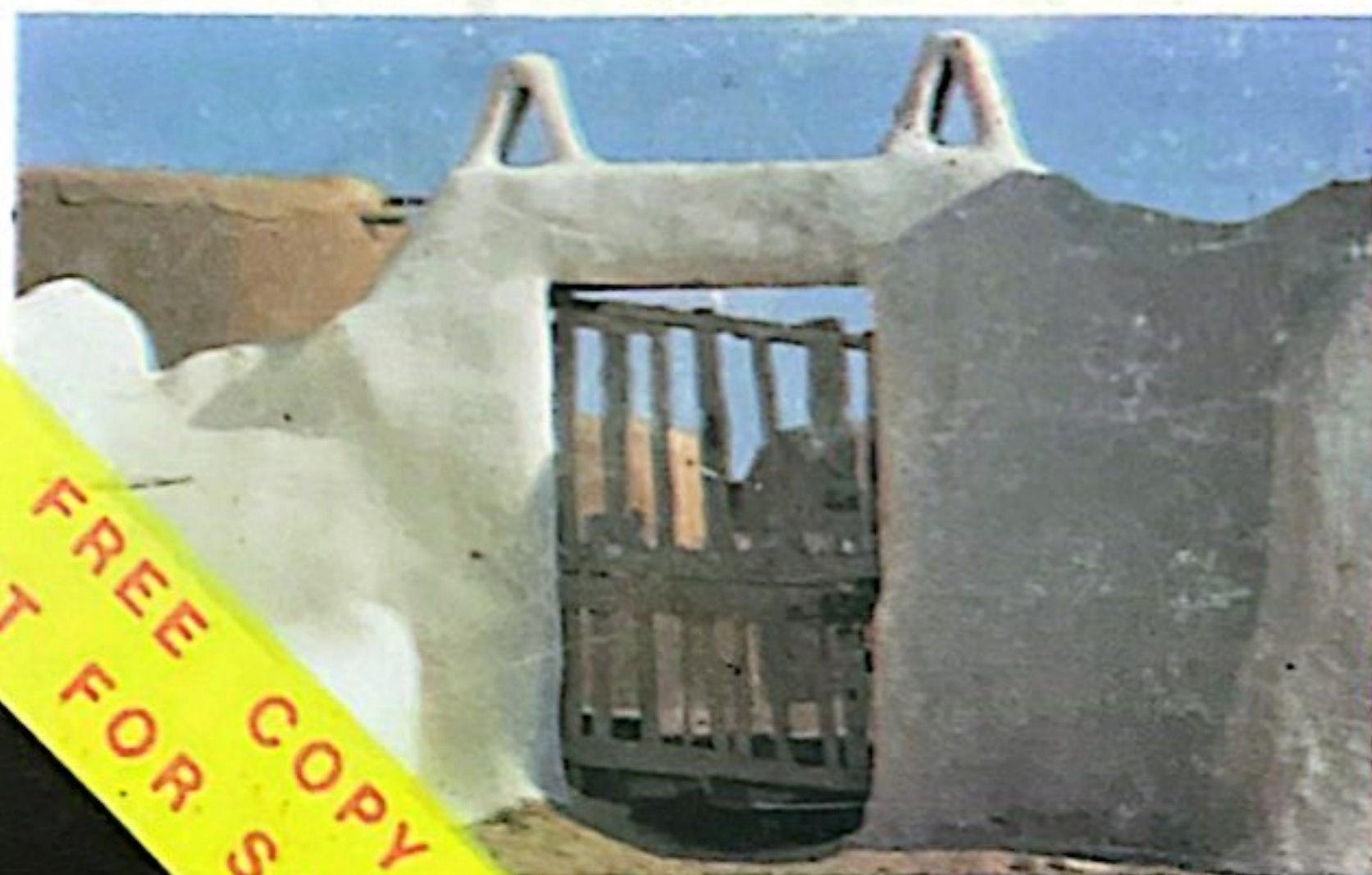
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This is Syria, where the great civilizations emerged, a cross-road between East and West and a meeting-place of cultures and ideas. Its people have enriched mankind's knowledge and have been enriched by it.

Syria is often described as being "the greatest small country in the world" because of the heritage it has given humanity. Your voyage through it will be one of wondrous discovery as you explore its artistic and aesthetic treasures.

Wherever you go, you will be received with a traditional greeting:

"May you be welcome in Syria"



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